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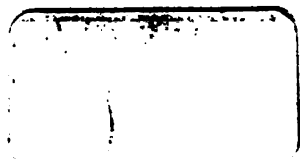
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THE LION'S BROOD

DUFFIELD OSBORNE



KE 3460



E. L. Tuttle
Ansonia
Conn.



THE LION'S BROOD





HERE AND THERE A GAUL WOULD BOUND FORWARD . . .
TO THROW HIMSELF PRONE BENEATH THE
VERMILLION HOOFES

THE LION'S BROOD

BY

DUFFIELD OSBORNE

Author of "The Spell of Aconitum," "The
Secret of the Crater," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY WALTER SAUNDERS



NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & CO.

1901

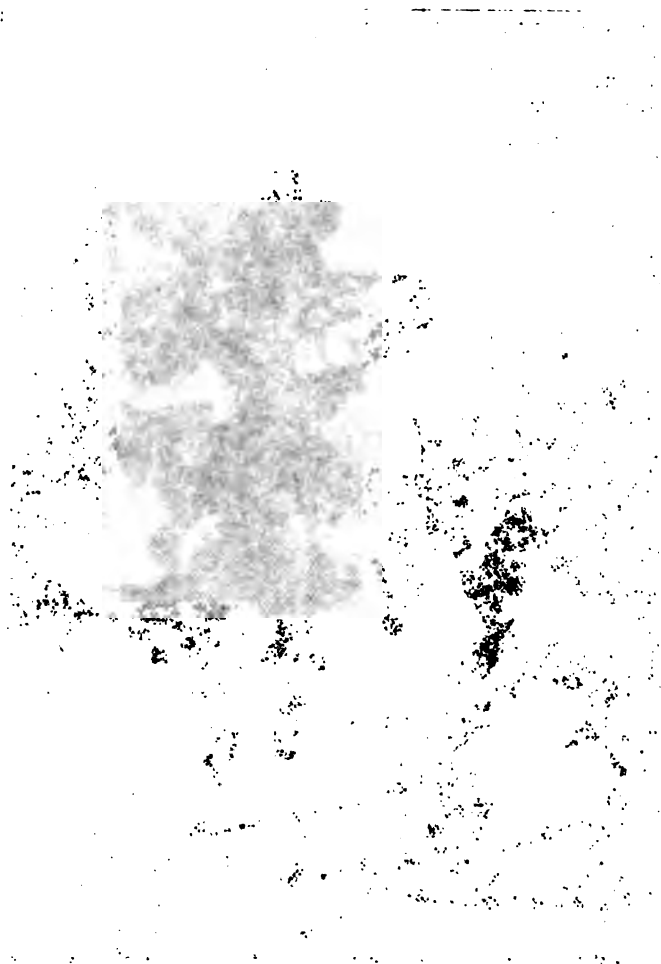


FIG. 1. BOUND FORWARD
ROCK BENEATH THE
WATER FLOOR

THE LION'S BROOD

BY

DUFFIELD OSBORNE

Author of "The Spell of Ashtaroth," "The
Secret of the Crater," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY WALTER SATTERLEE



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To the Memory of

HOWARD SEELY

BRILLIANT WRITER, TRUE-HEARTED GENTLEMAN,

STANCH AND LOYAL FRIEND

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PART I.

THE LION'S BROOD.

INTRODUCTION.

Centuries come and go; but the plot of the drama is unchanged, and the same characters play the same parts. Only the actors cast for them are new.

It is much worn, — this denarius, — and the lines are softened and blurred, — as of right they should be, when you think that more than two thousand years have passed since it felt the die. It is lying before me now on my table, and my eyes rest dreamily on its helmeted head of Pallas Nicephora. There, behind her, is the mint-mark and that word of ancient power and glory, "Roma." Below are letters so worn and indistinct that I must bend close to read them: "— M. S E R G I," and then others that I cannot trace.

Perhaps I have dozed a bit, for I must have turned the coin, unthinking, and now I see the reverse: a horseman, in full panoply, galloping,

with naked sword brandished in his left hand, from which depends a severed head tight-clutched by long, flowing hair.

The clouds hang low over the city, as I peer from my tower window, — driving, ever driving, from the east, and changing, ever changing, their fantastic shapes. Now they are the waving hands and gowns of a closely packed multitude surging with human passions; now they are the headlong rout of a flying army upon which press hordes of riders, dark, fierce, and barbarous — horses with tumultuous manes, and hands with brandished darts. Surely it is a sleepy, workless day! It will be vain to drive my pen across the pages.

I do not see the cloud forms now — not with my eyes, for they have closed themselves perforce; but my brain is awake, and I know that the eyes of Pallas Nicephora see them, and grow brighter as if gazing on well-remembered scenes.

Why not? How many thousand clinkings of coin against coin in purse and pouch, how many hundred impacts of hands that long since are dust, have served to dim your once clear relief!

Surely, Pallas, you have looked upon all this and much more. Shall I see aught with your

eyes, lady of my Sergian denarius? Shall I see, if, with you before me, I look fixedly at the legions of clouds that cross my window — an hour — two — three — even until the night closes in?

Grant but a grain of this, O Goddess, and lo! I vow to thee a troop of pipe-players upon the Ides of June.

I.

NEWS.

"A TROOP of pipe-players to Minerva on the Ides of June, if we win!"

"And my household to Mars, if we have lost!"

The speakers were hurrying along the street that leads down from the Palatine Hill toward the Forum, and both were young. Their high shoes fastened with quadruple thongs and adorned with small silver crescents proclaimed their patrician rank.

"Why do you vow as if the gods had already passed judgment, Lucius?"

"Because, my Caius, I am very sure that a battle has been fought. What else do these rumours mean that are flying through the city? rumours that none can trace to a source. It is only a few minutes, since my freedman, Atius, told me how the slaves report that our neighbour Marcus Sabrius rode in last night through the Ratumenian Gate; and when I sent to his house to inquire, the doorkeeper feigned ignorance. That is only one of a hundred tales.

Note the crowd thickening around us as we approach the Forum, and how all are pressing in the same direction. Study their faces, and doubt what I say if you can."

"But is it victory or defeat?"

"Answer me your own question, Caius. Is 'victory' or 'defeat' the word that men do not dare to utter?"

The face of Caius became grave. Then suddenly he burst out with:—

"You are right. I see it all now, even as you speak; and what hope had we from the first? Who was the demagogue Flaminius that he should command our army, going forth without the auspices—a consul that was no consul at all in the sight of the gods! Then, too, there were the warnings that poured in from all the country: the ships in the sky, the crow alighting on the couch in the Temple of Juno, the stones rained in Picinum—"

"Foolish stories, my Caius; the dreams of ignorant rustics," replied Lucius, smiling faintly. "Besides, you remember they were all expiated—"

"And who knows that they were expiated truly!" croaked an old woman from a booth by the road. "Who does not know that, as Varro says, your patrician magistrates would rather

lose a battle than that a plebeian consul should triumph! Varbo, the butcher, dreamed last night that his son's blood was drenching his bed, and when he awoke, it was water from the roof; and Arates, the Greek soothsayer, says that Varbo's son has been slain in the water, and his blood —"

But the young patricians, who had halted a moment at the interruption, now hurried on with an expression of contempt on their faces.

"That is what Flaminius stands for," resumed Lucius after a moment of silence. "How can we look for success when such men are raised to the command, merely because they *are* such men; and when a Fabius and a Claudius are set aside because their fathers' fathers led the armies of the Republic to victory in the days when this rabble were the slaves they should still be."

The friends had turned into the Sacred Way. A moment later they arrived at the Forum lined with its rows of booths nestled away beneath massive porticoes of peperino, and with its columned temples standing like divine sentinels about or sweeping away up the rugged slope of the Capitoline to where the great fane of Jupiter Capitolinus shed its protecting glory over the destinies of Rome.

Below, the broad expanse of Forum and Comitia was thronged with a surging crowd — patricians and plebeians, — elbowing and pushing one another in mad efforts to get closer to the Rostra and to a small group of magistrates, who, with grave faces, were clustered at the foot of its steps. These latter spoke to each other in whispers, but such a babel of sounds swelled up around them that they might safely have screamed without fear of being overheard.

The booths were emptied of their cooks and butchers and silversmiths. Waving arms and the flutter of robes emphasized the discussions going on on every side. Here a rumour-monger was telling his tale to a gaping cluster of pallid faces; there a plebeian pot-house orator was arraigning the upper classes to a circle of lowering brows and clenched fists, while the sneering face of some passing patrician told of a disdain beyond words, as he gathered his toga closer to avoid the contamination of the rabble.

One sentiment, however, seemed to prevail over all, and, beside it, curiosity, party rancour, wrath, and contempt were as nothing. It was anxiety sharpened even into dread that brooded everywhere and controlled all other passions, while itself threatening at every moment to

sweep away the barriers and to loose the warm southern blood of the citizens into a seething flood of furious riot or headlong panic.

The two young men had descended into this maelstrom of popular excitement, and were making such headway as they could toward the central point of interest. Now and again they passed friends who either looked straight into their faces, without a sign of recognition, or else burst out into floods of information,—prayers for news or vouchsafings of it,—news, good or bad, true or false. Perhaps three-fourths of the distance had been covered at the expense of torn togas and bruised sides, when a sudden commotion in front showed that something was happening. The next moment the hard, stern face of Marcus Pomponius Matho, the prætor peregrinus, rose above the crowd, and then the broad purple band upon his toga, as he mounted the steps of the Rostra.

It seemed hours—almost days—that he stood there, grave and silent, looking down into the sea of upturned faces, while the roar of the multitude died away into a gentle murmur, and then into a silence so oppressive that each man seemed to be holding his breath. Once the magistrate's lips moved, but no words came from them, and strange noises, as of the

clenching of teeth and sharp, quick breathing, rose all about. Then a voice came from his mouth, the very calmness of which seemed terrible:—

“Quirites, we have been beaten in a great battle. Our army is destroyed, and Caius Flaminius, the consul, is killed.”

For a moment there was stillness deeper almost than before, as if the leadlike words were sinking slowly but steadily along passage and nerve down to the central seats of consciousness; then burst forth a sound as of a single groan—the groan of Jupiter himself in mortal anguish; and then the noise of women weeping, the shrieking treble of age, and the rumbling murmur of curses and execrations,—against senate and nobles, against the rabble and their dead leader, but, above all, against Carthage and her terrible captain.

“Who are these men that slay consuls and destroy armies?” piped the shrill voice of an aged cripple who had struggled up from where he sat upon the steps of Castor, and was shaking the stump of a wrist toward the north.

“Are they not the men who surrendered Sicily that we might let them escape from us at Eryx? Did they not give up their ships, and pay us tribute, and scurry out of Sardinia

that Rome might spare them? I—I who am talking to you have seen their armies: naked barbarians from the deserts, naked barbarians from the woods—not one well-armed man in five—a rabble with a score of languages, to whom no general can talk. *They* to destroy the army of Rome—in her own land!—what crime have we committed that the gods should deal with us thus?”

“But the great beasts that tear up the ranks?” put in a young butcher, one of the circle that had been drawn together about the veteran.

“How did his elephants save Pyrrhus—and then we saw them for the first time?” retorted the cripple.

“You forget, that was before Rome had become the prey of demagogues; before she had Flaminius for consuls.”

All turned toward the new speaker—the young patrician whom his companion had called Lucius. He was a man perhaps twenty-five years of age, of middle height, sparely built but as if of tempered steel, with strong, commanding features and dark hawklike eyes that were now glittering with passion. It was not a handsome face except so far as strength and pride make masculine beauty, but it was the face of one whom a man might trust and a woman love.

The butcher was on the point of returning an angry retort, half to hide his awe of the other's rank, when a friend caught him by the arm.

"Do you not see it is Lucius Sergius Fidenas?" he whispered.

The result of the warning was still doubtful, when a sudden commotion in the crowd about them drew the attention of all to a short, thick-set man of middle age, in the light panoply of a mounted legionary. Cries went up from all about:—

"It is Marcus Decius." "He is from the army." "Tell us! what news?"

For answer the newcomer turned from one to the other of his questioners, with a dazed expression on his pale, drawn face.

"What shall I say, neighbours?" he muttered at last. "My horse fell just out there on the Flaminian road, and I came here on foot. I have eaten nothing for a day."

But they paid no attention to his wants, thronging around with almost threatening gestures and crying:—

"What news? What news—not of yourself—of the army?—of the battle?"

"There was no battle, and there is no army," said the man, dully.

Sergius forced his way to the front and threw one arm about the soldier. Then, turning to the crowd:—

“Stand back!” he cried, “and give him air. Do you not see the fellow is fainting?”

“No battle—and yet no army,” repeated Decius, in a murmurous monotone, when, for a moment, there were silence and space around him. “We marched by the Lake Trasimenus, and the fog lay thick upon us. Then came a noise of shouts and clash of arms and shrieks, but we saw nothing—only sometimes a great, white, naked body swinging a huge sword, and again a black man buried in his horse’s mane that waved about him as he rushed by—only these things and our own men falling—falling without ever a chance to strike or to see whence we were stricken.”

The crowd shuddered.

“And the elephants?”

“I did not see them. They say they are all dead.”

“And the consul?”

“I do not know.”

Just then the cripple from the steps was pushed forward.

“Flaminius is dead. He died fighting, as a Roman consul should. But you? What

are you, to let the pulse-eaters at him. You should have seen how *we* dealt with them off the Ægusian Islands."

"Or at Drepana?" sneered the horseman, roused from his lethargy by the other's taunt.

"That was what a *patrician* consul brought us to," muttered the cripple, glancing at Sergius. "Do you know what the Claudian did? When the sacred chickens would not eat, he cried out, 'Then they shall drink,' and ordered them thrown overboard. How could soldiers win when an impious commander had first challenged the gods?"

"And what about Flaminius ordering our standards to be dug up when they could not be drawn from the earth?" retorted the other.

"Did he do that?" asked several, and for a moment the feeling that had been with the cripple, and against the victim of this latest disaster, seemed divided.

Sergius perceived only too clearly that, in the present temper of men's minds, the faintest spark could light fires of riot and murder that might leave but a heap of ashes and corpses for the Carthaginian to gain. Taking advantage of the momentary lull, he said in conciliatory tones:—

"Flaminius neglected the auspices, and dis-

aster came upon us for his impiety, but it appears that he died like a brave soldier, and he is a whip-knave who strikes at such. As for this man, he needs succour and care. Stand aside, then, that I may take him where his wants may be ministered to. There will soon be plenty of fugitives to fill your ears with tales."

"Not many, master, not many," murmured Decius, as the young man forced a way for them through the crowd. "Some are taken, but most lie in the defile of Trasimenus or under the waters of the Lake."

Sergius hurried on, thinking of Varbo the butcher's dream, and of Arates the Greek soothsayer's interpretation.

II.

WORDS.

THREE days had passed since the awful news from the shore of Lake Trasimenus had plunged Rome into horror and despair. Every hour had brought in stragglers: horse, foot, fugitives from the country-side, each bearing his tale of slaughter. Crowds gathered at the gates, swarming about every newcomer, vociferous for his story, and then cursing and threatening the teller because it was what they knew it must be.

In the atrium of Titus Manlius Torquatus, on the brow of the Palatine, overlooking the New Way, was gathered a company of three: the aged master of the house, a type of the Roman of better days, and a worthy descendant of that Torquatus who had won the name; his son Caius, the youth who had been with Sergius in the Forum; and Lucius Sergius himself. All were silent and serious.

The elder Torquatus sat by a square fountain ornamented with bronze dolphins, that lay in the middle of the mosaic paving of the apartment. The walls were painted half yellow, half

red, after the manner of Magna Græcia, while around them were ranged the statues of the Manlian nobles. The roof was supported in the Tuscan fashion by four beams crossing each other at right angles, and including between them the open space above the fountain.

It was the old man who spoke first.

"Do not think, my Lucius, but that I see the justice of your prayer, or that I wish otherwise than that Marcia should wind wool about your doorposts. Still there is much to be said for delay. Surely these days are not auspicious ones for marriages, and surely better will come. You have my pledge, as had my dead friend Marcus Marcius in the matter of her name. Do you think it was nothing for me to call a daughter other than Manlia—and for a plebeian house at that? Yet she is Marcia. Doubt not that I will keep this word as well."

"Aye, but, father," persisted Sergius, "is it not something that she should be mine to protect in time of peril?"

"And who so able to protect as Lucius," put in Caius, with an admiring glance, for Caius Torquatus was six years younger than his friend, and admired him with all the devotion of a younger man.

"Has it come that our house cannot pro-

tect its women?" cried the elder Torquatus. "What more shameful than that our daughter should be carried thus across a Sergian threshold—going like a slave to her master!" He spoke proudly and sternly. Then, turning to Sergius, he went on more gently: "Were you to remain in the city, my son, there might be more force in what you claim; but you will go out with one of the new legions that they will doubtless raise, and you will believe an old man who says that it is not well for a soldier in the field to have a young wife at home."

Sergius flushed and was silent, lest his answer should savour of pride or disrespect toward an elder.

Suddenly they became conscious of a commotion in the street. Shrill cries were borne to their ears, and, a moment later, blows fell upon the outer door, followed by the grinding noise as it turned upon its pivots. A freedman burst into the atrium.

Titus Torquatus rose from his seat, and half raised his staff as if to punish the unceremonious intrusion. Then he noted the excitement under which the man seemed to be labouring, and stood stern and silent to learn what news could warrant such a breach of decorum.

"It is Maharbal, they say—" and the speaker's

voice came almost in gasps — "Maharbal and the Numidians —"

"Not at the gates!" cried both young men, springing to their feet; but the other shook his head and went on:—

"No, not that—not *yet*, but he has cut up four thousand cavalry in Umbria with Caius Centenius. The consul had sent them from Gaul —"

"Be silent!" commanded the elder Torquatus. "Surely I hear the public crier in the street. Is he not summoning the Senate? Velo," he said, turning to the freedman; "you are pardoned for your intrusion. Go, now, and bear orders from me to arm my household, and that my clients and freedmen wait upon me in the morning. It is possible that the Republic may call for every man; and though I fear Titus Manlius Torquatus cannot strike the blows he struck in Sicily, yet even *his* sword might avail to pierce light armour; and he is happy in that he can give those to the State whose muscles shall suffice to drive the point through heavy buckler and breastplate."

"Shall it be permitted that I attend you to the Senate House?" asked Caius.

His father inclined his head, and, donning the togas which slaves had brought, they hurried

into the street, hardly noting that Sergius had reseated himself and was gazing absently down into the water, counting the ripples that spread from where each threadlike stream fell from its dolphin-mouth source.

He did not know how long he had sat thus, nor was he, perhaps, altogether conscious of his motive in failing to pay the aged senator the honour of accompanying him, at least so far as the gates of the Temple of Concord. Sounds came to his ears from the apartments above: the trampling of feet and bustle of preparation that told of Velo's delivery of his patron's commands. Then a woman's laugh rang through the passage that led back to the garden of the peristyle.

Sergius rose and turned, just as a girl sprang out into the atrium, looking back with a laughing challenge to some one who seemed to pursue her, but who hesitated to issue from the protecting darkness.

"What do you fear, Minutia," she cried. "My father and Caius have gone, and there is no one — oh!"

Suddenly she became conscious of Sergius' presence, and her olive cheeks flushed to a rich crimson. Then she faced him with an air of pretty defiance and went on: —

"No one here but Lucius Sergius Fidenas, who should have business elsewhere."

Sergius said nothing, but continued to stand with eyes fixed thoughtfully upon her face.

Her figure was tall, slender, and very graceful, her hair and eyes were dark, and her features delicate and perfectly moulded. Over all was now an expression of hoydenish mirth that bespoke the complete forgetfulness of serious things that only comes to young girls. His attentive silence seemed at last to disturb her. An annoyed look drove the smile from her lips, and, with an almost imperceptible side motion of her small head, she went on:—

"Surely Lucius Sergius Fidenas has not allowed my father to go to the Senate House with only Caius to attend him! Lucius respects my father too much for that—and too disinterestedly. It is an even more serious omission than his failure to attend the consul at Trasimenus —"

Sergius' eyes blazed at the taunt, and, struggling with the answer that rose to his lips, he said nothing for fear he might say too much.

The girl watched him closely. Her mirth returned a little at the sight of his confusion, and, with her mirth, came something of mercy.

"Oh, to be sure, his wound. I almost for-

got that. Tell me, my brave Lucius, did the Gauls bite hard when they caught you in the woods and drove you and my brave uncle to Tanes? How funny for naked Gauls to ambush Roman legionaries and chase them home! Father has not spoken to Uncle Cneus since. He says it was his duty to have remained on the field, and I suppose he thinks it was yours, too, instead of running away like a fox to be shut up in his hole."

Sergius had recovered his composure now, but his brow was clouded.

"You are as cruel as ever, Marcia," he said. "And yet I know you have heard that it was the men of my maniple who carried me away, senseless from the blow of a dead man."

"Oh, you *did* kill him. I remember now," she resumed, with some display of interest. "You had run him through, had you not? and he just let his big sword drop on your head. I got Caius to show me about it, and I was the Gaul. Caius did not stab me, but I let the stick fall pretty hard, and Caius had a sore head for two days. I meant it for you, because you are trying to make an old woman of me when I am hardly a girl."

"Marcia—" began Lucius; but she raised her hand warningly and went on:—

"Do you want me to tell you why my father will not let you marry me now? There are two reasons. One because I don't want him to, and another because he thinks you must do something great to wipe out the stain of a Roman centurion's even being *carried* away before the Gauls."

"That will be an easy task, judging by the news we receive each day. I wish I felt as certain of the safety of the Republic as I am that my honour shall be satisfactorily vindicated."

He spoke bitterly, but she went on without taking note of his meaning.

"These are auspicious words, my Lucius. You will regain your honour; father will once more receive you into his favour, and, by that time, I shall doubtless be old enough to marry,—perhaps too old,—but, no, I must not wait so long as that. Perhaps I shall have married some one else by the time you are worthy of my favour."

"More probably I shall have ceased to care for the favour of living men and women."

"Truly? And you think you will have to die? Perhaps you will be a Decius Mus, and stand on the javelin and wear the Cincture Gabinus; and then I shall mourn for you and hang so many garlands on your tomb that all

the shades of your friends will be mad with jealousy — ”

“ Marcia, is it possible for you to be serious? ”

He was pale with suppressed passion, and, as he spoke, he stepped forward and laid his hand upon her wrist.

She sprang back and half raised a light staff she carried, while her face flushed crimson.

“ I will be more serious than will please you,” she said, “ if you please me as little as you do now. Learn, I am not your wife that you should seek to restrain me, and it is quite possible that I never shall be.”

“ You speak truly,” he said; “ it is quite possible that no woman shall be a new mother to the house of Fidenas — that our name shall die in me. So be it; and may the gods only avert the evils that threaten the Republic, nor look upon one of the race of the Trojan Segestes as an unworthy offering.”

Bending his head in respectful salutation, he turned toward the entrance hall.

Marcia stood silent beside the fountain, and her face clouded with thought. The sound of her lover's footsteps grew fainter and fainter. She started forward as if to follow him. Then she stopped and listened. The noise of the

street had drowned their echoes; the door had creaked twice on its pivots. He was gone. Then she called, "Lucius!" but there was no answer. Her eyes drooped with a little frown of regret, but in a moment she turned away laughing.

"Never mind. He cannot do anything very desperate yet, and I will treat him better next time — perhaps."

III.

PARTING.

THE ensuing days were pregnant with rumour and action. The waves of terror and despair that lashed over the city, as blow after blow fell, had now receded. The white banner, that was always lowered at the approach of an enemy, still spread its undulating folds above Janiculum; the crops and fruit trees and vines smiled upon the hillsides; the flocks and herds browsed peacefully along the Campagna with never a Numidian pillager to disturb their serenity; and, amid all, there was no rumour of allied gates opened to receive the invader, no welcome from the Italians whom he had striven to conciliate. Courage returned, and with courage firmness, and with firmness confidence to endure and dare and do, so long as invaders presumed to set foot upon the heritage of Rome.

How far this new confidence was born of the news that the Carthaginian was turning aside to the west, through Umbria and Picenum, how far by the rumour that Spoleto had

closed her gates and repulsed his vanguard, or how far by wrath at the tales of ravage and the numberless murders of Roman citizens that marked his line of march, it would be difficult to apportion.

However these, the city was now seething with energetic preparation. The Senate sat daily and into each night. No word of peace was uttered—all was war and revenge. Quintus Fabius Maximus was elected pro-dictator by a vote of the Comitia—not dictator, because that could only be done through appointment by the surviving consul, then absent in Gaul—or none knew where. By the same power, and in order to appease the commons irritated by criticisms of Flaminius, Marcus Minutius Rufus was elected master of the horse. Nor were the gods neglected. Their stimulating influence was invoked by the dictator to inspire the people with confidence, while he soothed them with the intimation that Flaminius had failed rather through overcourage and neglect of divine things than through mere plebeian temerity and ignorance. Fabius took care to impress it upon all that he himself would take full warning from the lesson. He moved that the Sibylline books should be consulted, and the Senate promptly acted upon the motion.

These directed that a holy spring be proclaimed forthwith; that every animal fit for sacrifice, and born between the Kalends of March and May throughout all Italy, should be offered to Jupiter. Votive games were decided upon, couches were set by the judges, whereon the twelve gods should feast in splendour, temples were vowed, to Venus Erycina by the dictator himself, to Mens by Titus Otacilius, the prætor.

But with all, and, as Fabius put it, that the immortal gods should not be overburdened with the petty affairs of mortals, every care that human prudence and warcraft could suggest was taken. Walls and towers were strengthened, and bridges were broken down; the inhabitants of open towns were driven into places of security, and their houses and crops destroyed. Amid all, the rumour came that Servilius was hastening back from Gaul; then, that he was close at hand, and, finally, Fabius set out to meet him, sending orders in advance that the consul should come without lictors, so that the dignity of the dictatorship might stand high before the people. And when Servilius had come, in all respects as commanded, then he, the consul, after first delivering up his legions which he had left

at Ariminum, was ordered to Ostia and the fleet to keep watch and ward over the Italian coast and to protect the corn ships. So all the armies of the Republic went to the prodictator, together with authority to raise such more as he should consider needful; two new legions in the place of those dead on the shores of Trasimenus, and some thousands of poorer citizens from the tribes, to man the quinqueremes of Servilius and the walls of Rome.

Amid these days of bustle and preparation, Sergius had found little difficulty in keeping his footsteps from Marcia's threshold. After the first grief of the conviction that she did not love him, pride came to his rescue. Should he, the head of the noblest house of the noble Sergian gens, should he abase himself and submit to scornful words even from a daughter of Torquatus? or, yet, should he, as a man, desire to bear the torch before an unwilling bride? These were simple questions, and there was but one word that could answer them; so Sergius struggled to put Marcia from his heart, until he flattered himself that the difficult task had at last been accomplished.

During this internal struggle, there came, also, to help him, word that he had been named as

one of the military tribunes in the new Fourth Legion, and, his wound being now almost well, he threw himself headlong into the work of the levy and of exercising his men, striving to bring them to such a degree of efficiency as might win honour for himself and advantage to the Republic. Now and again twinges of the old heart-pain would rack him, but he obstinately attributed all depression and melancholy to the inferior quality, both physically and socially, of many of the new levies, and to his misgivings as to the account they would render of themselves when confronted by the veterans of Hannibal.

At last the day of marching arrived, and with it the greatest struggle of all. Suddenly a suspicion awoke within him, whispering that the task he had set for himself was but poorly done; that the image of Marcia still smiled unbanished above the altar of his heart; and, with all his pride and strength, this suspicion of his weakness was, oddly enough, a source of positive exultation. Caius had been with him through much of his work, for Caius served in the same legion. It was evident, however, that the young man had received strict orders on one subject; for, in all their talks, the name of Marcia never passed his lips. This was unlike

Caius, who was thought by many to be given to overmuch speaking, and, for that reason, it irritated Sergius the more, who would sooner have cut away his hand than questioned his friend concerning his sister. Thus the two men, illogically but humanly enough, continued to grow apart, until, with never a thought but of friendliness, their intercourse became limited, through sheer embarrassment, to the commonplaces of fellow-soldiers who held light acquaintance with each other's names and faces.

As the hour drew near, the city bubbled with excitement, and the altars of the gods reeked with unnumbered victims. Especially invoked were Castor, Fortune, Liberty, and Hope, but, above all, the mighty trinity of the Capitol. Lest the pang of so great a parting with men who were about to encounter such grave dangers might sap the courage of those remaining, and thence that of the new levies, the dictator had wisely decreed that the army should assemble at Tibur. So it happened that there was none to go now save himself and a small escort of cavalry, five *turmæ*, at the head of which was Sergius. With these went Rome's last hope: the cast behind which lay only ruin, but for the averting favour of the gods.

At midday the fasces would be carried forth, and it lacked but an hour of the time. Sergius had prepared everything; his men were ready to mount at the blast of the trumpet, and his household was set in order against the absence of its master. He was standing within the Viminal Gate, while an attendant held his horse close by and a little apart from the crowds of weeping women who surrounded the soldiers of the dictator's escort. Suddenly he felt some one pluck him by the cloak, and turned quickly to see a young woman in the single tunic of a slave. Her dress, however, was of finer texture than that worn by most of her class, and seemed to bespeak a rich mistress and especial favour. She stood with her finger to her lips, her eyes great with the importance of her mission.

"My mistress, the Lady Marcia, orders that you come and bid her farewell," she whispered hurriedly.

Then she darted away among the crowd, before the young tribune could make answer to an invitation so oddly worded.

His first impulse was to show the Lady Marcia that he was not to be dismissed and sent for—much less ordered back at the caprice of a girl. His next was to humour the

whim of a child, and his third was to obey humbly and thankfully, without a thought but of Marcia's beauty and his own good fortune.

A word to his slave and another to his horse, whereat the former loosed the bridle, and the latter knelt for his master. Then came a wild gallop across the crest of the Viminal Hill, through the ill-omened street where the wicked Tullia had driven over her father's corpse, into the Forum, and out up the New Way to the house of Torquatus.

Throwing his rein to the porter, Sergius entered the court of the atrium, vacant and resounding to the hurried tread of his cothurni. Pausing for a moment and hesitating to penetrate farther into the house, he became aware that the porter had followed him. Like most of his class, he was a man considerably past middle life, and thus considered suited to the comparative ease and responsibility of his position. With a freedom and garrulity born of long service, he began:—

“It was a word I was commanded to deliver to the most noble Sergius, and I doubt not it would have been well and truly delivered, but for his springing from his horse so quickly and rushing past me. It is possible that I might have come to him sooner had he not left me to

take care of the animal, and it needed time to summon the groom, whose duty such work is. Therefore — ”

“By Hercules, man, give me the message! Do you think I can listen all day to your gabbling?” cried the soldier, furious with impatience.

A faint laugh seemed to come from somewhere beyond the hallway.

“I was about to say, most noble lord,” pursued the porter, hardly ruffled by the outburst; “and I trust you will pardon me if I dallied overmuch; but — ”

Sergius raised his hand. Then, thinking better of the blow, he seized the man by the throat.

“Perhaps I can shake the words out like dice from a box. Now for the Venus cast!” he cried, suiting the action to the speech.

“Are you making trial of your strength that you may break more readily into Carthaginian houses? Remember it is soldiers with whom you are to contend.”

Sergius turned quickly, to see Marcia herself standing at the entrance to the hall. In her eyes, on her lips, was malicious laughter; but a little red spot on either cheek seemed to tell of some stronger feeling behind. He had re-

leased the porter so quickly that the latter staggered back almost into the fountain, and Marcia smiled.

"I think I have been taking a great deal of trouble for the sake of a very discourteous person," she said. "I sent Minutia to tell a certain soldier that I am willing to bid him farewell, despite his unworthiness, and he comes and nearly strangles poor old Rhetus for trying to say that I was awaiting him in the peristyle."

"Rhetus' attempt was not very successful, and my time was short," said Sergius, growing alternately red and pale.

"And so you thought to hasten his speech by closing his throat? Oh! you are a wise man — a very logical man. They should have made *you* dictator, so that you could save Italy by surrendering Rome."

"Is it to say such things that you sent for me?" asked Sergius, after a pause during which he struggled against embarrassment and wrath.

"Surely not, for how could I know that you were going to behave so outrageously? If you will follow me, we will go into the peristyle."

She turned back through the passage, and Sergius followed, issuing a moment later into a large, cloister-like court, open in the middle,

and decorated with flowers and shrubs. Four rows of columns, half plain, half fluted, supported the shed roof that protected the frescoes. These covered three of the walls. On the back was a garden scene so painted as to seem like a continuation of the court itself into the far distance; on the right was the combat between Æneas and Turnus, and on the left a representation of the first Torquatus despoiling the slain Gaul of the trophy from which the family took its name.

“And now I will tell you why I sent.”

She had seated herself in a marble chair with wolf heads carved on the arms, and her face had grown grave and thoughtful.

“It was to tell you a dream—a dream of you that I had last night.”

Her cheek flushed, and Sergius’ eyes sparkled.

“You dreamt of *me*?” he said in a low voice. He half raised his arms and came nearer; but she held up one hand in the old imperious manner.

“If you please, I have not sent for you that you should grow presumptuous, because I was unmaidenly enough to dream of so badly behaved a person as yourself. It—it was because it—I thought you should know, so that the omen might be expiated.”

Sergius had halted and was standing still. His lip curled slightly.

"I dreamt," she went on, after a short pause, "that there was a wide plain with mountains about it and a river running through; and it was all heaped up with dead men — thousands upon thousands — stripped of arms and clothing, and the air was gray with vultures, and the wolves and foxes were calling to each other back among the hills. And I was very sad and walked daintily so that my sandals and gown might not be splashed with the blood that curdled in pools all about. Suddenly I came to a heap of slain whereon *you* were lying, with a long javelin through your body. So I screamed and awoke —"

"Surely, then, you felt sorrow," cried Sergius, who had followed the narrative with deep interest, but who seemed to consider nothing of it save the concern she had shown at his death.

"I — I," she began; and then, as if angry with herself at the betrayal of feeling and of her embarrassment, she burst out; "I did not send, foolish one, that you should consider *me*. Look rather to yourself."

But Sergius was full of the joy of his own thoughts.

"That I shall do, my Marcia, by setting my

mind upon things that are better than myself — the Republic — you — ”

“ Ah, but the omen ? ”

“ I shall put it aside together with the other : that you have called me back from the march ; and I shall consider both well expiated by the knowledge that I am not as nothing to you.”

Her face grew pale, and she half rose from the chair.

“ Truly, I did not think about calling you back. It is terrible — all this — and it is my doing — ”

“ Then, if you wish, I shall lay it up against you,” cried he, gayly, “ unless you promise to be Caia in my house — ”

“ You are unfair to press me now and by such means.”

“ But it must be now,” exclaimed the young man, springing forward and trying to catch her in his arms. “ Do you not see I must leave you at once ? Shall it be without a promise ? ”

The blush had turned again to little anger spots, as she evaded him.

“ Very well,” she said slowly. “ I will be Caia where thou art Caius — ”

Sergius’ face shone with exultation, and his lips parted.

"I will be Caia," she resumed, "upon the day when Orcus sends back the dead from Acheron."

His expression of joy faded, and indignation took its place. Surely this was carrying light speech too far—and at such a time. Suddenly he realized that the dictator might already have ridden on, and disgrace have fallen upon a Sergius at the very beginning of the campaign.

"So be it! I accept that omen—with the others," he cried sternly, and, turning, strode out through the atrium, bounded upon his horse, and dashed headlong down the street, before Marcia was fairly aware that he had gone from her presence.

IV.

FABIUS.

SERGIUS rode back to his men, deeply wounded in love and pride. He tried to excuse Marcia for her treatment of him, on the score of her youth and of youth's thoughtlessness; he blamed himself for his abruptness and his lack of knowledge of women — failings that had perhaps turned an impending victory into the defeat that now oppressed him. Worst of all, there was no hope to remedy his or her fault. A dangerous campaign lay before him, and the omens — but pshaw! *he* was not one of the rabble, to tremble at a flight of birds from the west or an ox with a bad liver. He had always admired the spirit of that old sceptic, Claudius, who had drowned the chickens off Drepana, though he admitted the faulty judgment in failing to realize the effect of such a defiance upon ignorant seamen and marines: the hierarchy was necessary for the State; if only to keep fools in order, but for a man of family and education — well, he smiled. It provoked him, amid all his disbelief, that he could not help prefer-

ring that those same omens had been more favourable. Pride, pride was his last and truest safeguard. He, a descendant of the companion of Æneas, to fear the Carthaginian sword! he, a Roman noble, about to face death for his country, to waste his thoughts upon a silly girl who chose to flout him!

Then the long clarions of the cavalry rang out, and the horsemen ran to their steeds. Down the slope of the Viminal rode the dictator: before him went the twenty-four axes, each in its bundle of staves, their bearers robed in military cloaks of purple cloth; behind came a small troop of illustrious Romans—his legati, his staff, nominated by him and sanctioned by the Senate for their fame and skill in war; also such senators as had elected, by way of personal compliment, to ride with the general and to partake as volunteers in whatever share of the war he might set for them.

Quintus Fabius Maximus seemed a man just passing the prime of life. His figure, as he sat his horse, was squat rather than tall, though this appearance might be due, in a measure, to the great breadth of his shoulders; altogether his frame seemed one better adapted to feats of strength and endurance than for those of agility. The face, with its grizzled hair and beard, both

cut short, suited well the figure that bore it. Dignity, firmness, and kindness were in its strong and rugged outlines, with less, perhaps, of the pride of race and rank than might have been looked for in the head of the great family whose name he bore—he who was now twice dictator of the destinies of Rome. For dress, his purple cloak, similar to those of his lictors, hung loosely from his shoulders to below his knees, and, opening in front, disclosed a corselet of leather overlaid with metal across chest and abdomen, and embossed with bronze designs of ancient pattern and workmanship. The hem of the white tunic showed below the leathern pendants that hung a foot down from his girdle; the greaves were ornamented at the knees with lions' heads; an armour-bearer carried his master's bronze helmet with its crest of divergent red plumes.

Such was the man upon whom Rome now depended for her saving—"for victory," dreamed such of the unthinking as had recovered from their terror; "for time, time, time," reasoned the man with the deep-set, gray eyes upon whom they had pinned their faith.

Hardly a stride behind him rode Marcus Minucius Rufus, tall and well-built, with bold, coarse features and fierce, roving eyes. His

red hair bristled from his brow, and he seemed to restrain with difficulty either his steed or himself from darting forward into the lead.

"Yonder is the sword of the Republic," said one of Sergius' men, as the master-of-the-horse rode by the escort; but the man to whom he said it—an old soldier of the Spanish wars—only shrugged his shoulders. A moment later he grunted in reply:—

"Like enough; but it is a shield that the Republic needs most of all."

Then the clarion summoned them to fall in behind the dictator's company, and the troop rode out from the gate—out into the broad plain—away from the protecting walls fluctuant with waving stoles, and from which tear-dimmed eyes strove to follow them among the villas, farms, and orchards of the country-side—away from the Forum, from the sacred fig tree and the black stone of Romulus—away from the divine triad that kept guard over the Capitol. Beyond lay the Alban Mountains, and, beyond these,—no one knew where,—the strange dangers that awaited them: fierce Spaniards with slender blades as red as the crimson borders of their white coats; wild Numidian riders that always fell upon the rear of Rome's battle; serried phalanges of Afri-

cans, veterans of fifty wars; naked Gauls with swords that lopped off a limb at every stroke; Balearic slingers whose bullets spattered one's brains over the ground; Cretans whose arrows could dent an æs at a hundred yards; and above all, over all, the great mind, the unswerving, unrelenting purpose that had blended all these elements into one terrible engine of destruction to move and smite and burn and ravage at the touch of a man's will.

The cavalry rode two and two, thinking of such things; picked men, equipped in the new Greek fashion with breastplate, stout buckler, and strong spear pointed at both ends. What thoughts held the mind of the general, none could fathom. With head slightly inclined he seemed to study, now the ribbons woven in his horse's mane, now the small, sensitive ears that pricked backward and forward, as the Tiburtine Way flowed sluggishly beneath. As for Minucius, he alone seemed hopeful and unimpressed by the dangers that menaced. He glided here and there, reining his horse beside this senator or that lieutenant to utter a word of the safety assured to Rome and of the ruin that hung over the invader, or even calling back to the foremost of the escort some rough badinage upon their gloomy looks; for Minucius was

a man of the people, scorning patrician pride of race, and wishing it known that, however high his rank, he held himself no whit better than any potter of the Aventine or weaver of the Suburra.

So, riding, thinking, talking, they reached Tibur, where the new levies lay encamped.

Thence began the march of the army—a long, weary march to strike the line of the Carthaginian devastators; and, as it rolled onward, the stream of war gathered volume. At Daunia they were joined by the legions of Servilius that had marched down from Ariminum; and, at every point, contingents of the allies poured in, until even the most timid began to believe it impossible that disaster could befall, and grew first confident, then defiant, then boastful.

To the mind of the dictator himself, however, came no such change. He alone knew the danger, he alone knew the value of the force with which he must meet it—soldiers in whose minds, despite all their present spirit, lingered the tradition of defeat; raw levies not yet truly confident of their officers or themselves, however much the sight of their numbers and their brave show might blind them to the fact that there was another side to the war.

And now rumours began to reach them of the enemy. He was at Prætutia, at Hadriana, at Marrucina, at Frentana! He had set out toward Iapygia! he had reached Luceria! and everywhere the country was a garden before him and a desert behind. Only one gleam of light shone through the darkness,—the Apulians submitted to ravage, but they refused to save their lands by joining fortunes with the invaders.

At last came the day of trial. "The enemy was at hand." Scouts poured in with news of foraging parties, of masses of troops on the march; and at Æcæ the dictator ordered the camp to be pitched and fortified in the order that Roman discipline prescribed, with rampart and ditch and stakes—a city in embryo.

Now it was that the boasters must stand by their boasts.

Scarcely had the morning broke, when the distant mist of the plain seemed to sparkle with myriads of glittering points—seemed to thicken and become dense with clouds of dust. Mingled noises came to the ears of the waking legions,—the neighing of horses, the inarticulate murmur of a multitude, the dull rumble of marching men, the ring of arms and accoutrements.

Then came the order from the prætorium,—

not to advance the standards, but to man the rampart and to repel. Such was not the custom of Rome—to refuse battle amid the ravaged lands of her allies. Had the heart of the dictator grown cold? Forthwith the pale cheeks of the boasters flushed again; lips that had been compressed, before the terrors they had so rashly invoked, parted in wonder and complaint; the mist rose, and the sun pierced through the settling dust. There stood the enemy, drawn up in order of battle across the plain, and waiting; too far away for the Romans to make out their form or equipment—just a long, dense array that seemed dark or light in spots. Now and again a trumpet rang out its distant note of defiance; now and again some portion of the line seemed to manœuvre or change front, as if to tempt attack, while from time to time a flurry of horsemen—dark-skinned riders, bending low upon the necks of wiry little steeds and urging them with shrill, barbarous cries—swept almost up to the ditch, and brandished their darts, making obscene gestures and shouting words that brought the blood to the faces of the garrison, though they understood not the tongue that uttered them.

A circle of officers surrounded the dictator's tent. Some were silent and shamefaced; some

were vociferous of their desire to be allowed to go forth and fight; or, at least, to lead out the cavalry to chastise the insolence of slaves and barbarians; all were wondering and dissatisfied. Few, however, ventured to express their full thoughts. There was something in the very mildness of the general that discouraged too direct criticism. Only Minucius, presuming, perhaps on his position of second in command, perhaps on his contempt for the great houses, sought the dictator's presence and spoke as if half to him, half to the company of officers. Even his first words but thinly veiled his feelings.

"The enemy await us in line of battle, my master, but I do not see the red flag above your tent. Is it your will that the standards be advanced?"

"No, Marcus, it is not my will, or the signal would have been displayed," said Fabius, calmly.

"The troops are eager to be led out; the enemy insult us up to the very ditch. Italy is wasted," went on Minucius; but, as if slightly cowed by the deep, gray eyes, his tone seemed less aggressive.

Fabius paused a moment, before answering, and glanced around upon the lowering faces of legates and tribunes. Then he said: —

"It is proper, Quirites, that I should say something to you of my plans. Our men are new — untried. Those that have seen service have seen defeat. The enemy are flushed with victory, full of confidence in themselves and their general, well seasoned in battle. Has the Republic a new army if this be lost? But happily there is another side to the picture. We are in our own lands. Our supplies are inexhaustible; *we* receive; *they* must take. We shall wear them out in skirmishes, cut off their foragers — men whom they cannot replace, while we replace our losses daily and season ourselves in battle and grow to see that even Carthaginians are not immortal."

There was a moment of silence. Then Minucius spoke again.

"And, while we pursue this prudent policy, what becomes of the spirit of our men who see that their general dares not face the enemy? What becomes of the allies who see their fields wasted and cities burned, while Rome lies silent in her camps and offers no succour?"

Fabius' brow clouded, but he spoke even more mildly than before.

"There is much of truth in what you say, Marcus; but I am convinced that there is less danger in such risks than in tempting the fate

of Flaminius; and there are many compensations, together with certain victory in the end."

And then the master-of-the-horse lost control of his temper; his voice rose, and he cried out:—

"You are general and you command, but you shall hear me when I say that I had rather have perished bravely with a Flaminius than live to conquer in such cowardly fashion with a Fabius."

A murmur of half-uttered applause ran around the circle, but Fabius did not seem to hear it. He eyed his lieutenant calmly for an instant. Then he said:—

"You speak truth, Marcus, when you say that I am general;" and, turning his back upon Minucius, he passed through the line of officers, as they fell aside to give him way, and proceeded slowly toward the prætorian gate.

Here, among the soldiers, discontent with the dictator's policy was as strong as it had been in the prætorium, while its expression was less governed by the amenities of rank. Roman discipline, however severe as to the acts of the legionary, put very few restrictions upon his speech; and the general, as he watched from the rampart the lines and movements of the enemy, heard many comments no less uncom-

plimentary than those of his master-of-the-horse, and couched in language almost as coarse as that of the Numidians themselves. It seemed as if the foul words of the barbarians were passed on thus to the man held responsible for Romans being compelled to listen to such insults.

Curiously enough, the centurions and under officers appeared to be the only ones not hostile to Fabius' policy. These were silent or even made some efforts to restrain the ribaldry of their men.

As for the general himself, no one could have appeared less conscious of the storm his orders had provoked. His eyes were still fixed upon the distant array, and when, as the sun almost touched the meridian, Lucius Sergius approached with despatches just arrived from Rome, he was compelled to speak twice before the other was aware of his presence. Then the dictator turned quickly, and, pointing to the Carthaginians, exclaimed:—

“See! they are withdrawing. Do you not note how thin the centre grows? Ah! I shall teach them new lessons of war—new lessons. They will find in me no Flaminius, to let my enemy choose the day and field of battle.”

Leaving the ramparts, they walked back toward the prætorium, Fabius breaking the

seals and reading the letters as he walked. When they reached the tent, he stood still for a moment and seemed to study the face of the young tribune who had followed, a half pace behind, to receive any answer or order that might be forthcoming.

"What is your opinion of my refusing battle?" he asked suddenly, after a short silence.

Sergius turned crimson, but he answered quickly:—

"I have learned to trust in my general until such time as I know him to be unworthy of trust."

Fabius smiled.

"Some of your colleagues appear to have already arrived at the latter conclusion," he said. Then, after a pause, he went on: "After all, it is the judgment of the centurions that counts for most. Our legates and tribunes feel disgraced by our refusing a challenge; they may be sneered at for *that*, but who would blame *them* for the defeat that might follow its acceptance. The common soldier knows only his rage against the enemy, sees his comrades about him furious for battle, and comprehends nothing of its dangers. It is the centurions, our veterans, who realize the truth: the worth of their own men as measured against those

of the enemy; nor are they puffed up with foolish pride of rank. You observe, sir, that the centurions are with me."

Sergius bowed.

"Now mark well what will happen," pursued Fabius. "Hannibal will retreat to his camp; he will break camp and march off during the night. He must have forage, and he cannot scatter his forces while I am near. He will escape, and I shall let him, rather than risk the army in a night battle; but I shall hang close as the father-wolf to the stag's haunch, keeping nevertheless to the high ground, where his cavalry cannot trouble me. There will be need of good horsemen who shall cling yet closer and advise me of his movements."

Sergius' eyes flashed with eagerness, but he said nothing.

"You will attend to this service," continued Fabius, not seeming to regard the young officer's exultation. "Take the other five *turmæ* of your legion — not those of the escort. You must have light cavalry to cope with the Numidians, and your Greek horsemen are too heavily equipped. Assemble your men, watch the enemy, follow him when he marches to-night, cut off his stragglers, and send such words to me as you consider necessary. This

shall be your reward for trusting greater things to your general."

Turning, he entered the tent, before the tribune could express his thanks.

Deeply impressed by the favour and confidence of the dictator, Sergius hurried away to his quarters, and, sending for Marcus Decius, the decurion who had told the news of Trasimenus to the crowd of the Forum, he directed him to see that the horses were fed and the men in readiness for a night march. Then he resigned himself to sleep and dreams of a certain pictured peristyle on the Palatine Hill, — a peristyle wherein a maid sat spinning by a fountain and thinking — of what? Perhaps of him — for he was only dreaming, and maidens do not always think as men dream.

V.

TEMPTATION.

THE night was already far spent, and the Roman camp slept on, secure in all its grim array; silent, but for the tread of the patrols, as they paced the streets and exchanged the watch-word, post with post, or but for the clang of sword upon greave, or shield against cuirass, as some sentry at gate, rampart or prætorium shifted his arms in weary waiting for the day.

Far up in the heavens the moon shone silvery and serene, while here and there upon the plain below swaying points of light seemed to move, flicker, go out, and rekindle again. No Roman watcher but knew well that play of moonlight upon the heads of the reedlike spears with which the ancient cavalry of the legion were equipped—weapons which, together with their ox-hide bucklers, were being gradually superseded by the heavier Greek accoutrements. Yes, and had not the word passed from the guard at the prætorian gate, how a tribune and five *turmæ* of the fourth legion had ridden out on the service of the dictator?

Earlier in the night, those who listened closely had heard a low hum that seemed to pervade the air, rising and falling like the dull glow in the west that told of the fluctuant watch-fires of the hostile camp. Now the noises had died away, as in the distance, and the light that had flashed up a few hours since hardly tinted the clouds. It is only the old soldier who can read the signs of a decamping foe, who knows how the fagots must be heaped at the moment of departure, so that the deserted fires may burn until the morning, whose quick ear catches and recognizes the indefinite noises of a host moving in secret. All these things were, and old campaigners among the legionaries at the gate had read them aright. Messenger after messenger hurried to the prætorium, and returned with word that the dictator slept, "having taken all needed measures," and how the master-of-the-horse paced up and down before his tent, grinding his teeth, clenching his hands, and muttering curses upon patrician cowardice and imbecility.

Meanwhile, Lucius Sergius rode on through the night, with Marcus Decius at his side, and the troop of horse trailing out across the plain behind them.

"It is silent, master," said the decurion, but

his attitude, as he leaned forward over his horse's neck, was rather of one trying to smell than to listen. "The pulse-eaters sleep deeply." He watched Sergius from under half-closed lids, waiting to be contradicted, that he might measure his officer's warcraft.

Sergius smiled. "Perhaps they are even wider awake than ourselves," he said, drawing rein. Then, as the other nodded several times in satisfied acquiescence, he brought his horse to his haunches a stride beyond, and added: "It was the dictator who said we should find their lair empty, and, though I do not question his judgment, it will be well to send on a few who shall spy out the fact, and see whether there be not Numidians lurking among the huts."

So, slowly and cautiously, they pushed forward again, with riders in advance, until a shout gave notice that the way was indeed clear, and they rode through the open gate of the rampart and along the silent street of the deserted camp.

Nothing was about them save dismantled huts, for the most part mere burrows with roofs of interlaced boughs that were now smoking amid the ashes of the fires. Not a sign of disorder, nor even of the rapidity with

which so great an army had been moved; not a scale of armour left behind—only the insufferable stench of a barbarian camp, of offal and refuse piled or scattered about, of dead beasts and of dead men—the sick and wounded who had yielded to sword or disease during the last few days.

It was with a sense of relief that the cavalcade emerged from the shadows of the huts and began to mount the rising ground beyond. The moon, too, had grown faint, and the gray mists of the morning were lying along the lower levels. Sounds, mingled and far ahead, told of the presence of a marching host, and Sergius led his troop on a more oblique course to gain the flank of the foe and lessen the chances of detection and ambushade.

It was not stirring work for a soldier—the days that followed; never attacking, always guarding against discovery and surprise, viewing slaughter and devastation that duty and weakness alike made him powerless to prevent or punish, sending courier after courier to his general to tell of the enemies' march or of stragglers and foragers to be crushed in the jaws of the army that enveloped the invader's rear. Thus the war passed through Apulia, over the Apennines, down

into the old Samnite lands, past Beneventum that closed its gates and mourned over its devastated fields, on across the Volturnus, descending at last into the Falernian plain, the glory of Campania, the Paradise of Italian wealth and luxury.

During all these days Sergius had grown thinner and browner. Little furrows had been ploughed between the eyes that must pierce every ridge and thicket for the glint of javelins and the wild faces of the bridgeless riders of the desert. From time to time news of devastators cut to pieces brought a fierce joy to his heart; from time to time he dreamt he saw the eagles of the Republic hovering upon the heights above, ready to stoop and strike and save the allied lands from trials greater than they could bear; but of Marcia, scarce a waking thought. Surely the man he now was had never reclined in peaceful halls where women plied the distaff and talked about love, and of how Rabuleius, the perfume-maker of the Suburra, had just received a new essence from Arabia! That old life was all a dream, perhaps the memory of a former existence, as the sage of Croton had taught. There was nothing real in the world, in these days, but fear and suffering and humiliation and revenge.

Even duty had become a mere habit that should minister to greater influences.

And now it was worst of all. Campania was a conflagration from which rose supplications and shrieks and groans, mingled with curses against the cowardly ally that had left her to her fate. Still the legions held to the high ground, and still the black pest of Numidia swept hither and thither on its errand of murder and rapine. Even to Sergius the plans of the dictator began to seem but "coined lead," as Marcus Decius roughly put it. Of what avail was it that the pass at Tarracina was blocked, that he had garrisoned Casilinum in the enemies' rear and Cales upon the Latin Way, and that the sea and the Volturnus and the steep hills with their guarded passes seemed to complete the line of circumvallation? Could such bonds hold one so wise as Hannibal from the rich cities of the plain? Unless Rome would advance her standards, were not Sinuessa and Cumæ, Puteoli and Neapolis, Nuceria and Teanum, and, above all, Capua, left to fight their own battle against barbarian insolence and barbarian power? What hope to starve out an enemy established in such a region and amid such affluence!

Then, too, there was less work now for Ser-

gius, even such as it was. The enemy, where-soever he marched, was well in view from a dozen points held by the dictator, and at last word came to the tribune that he should join the camp near Casilinum. There, at least, he would have companionship in shame, instead of seeming to command men and being unwilling to lead them to fight for lands which the gods themselves had deemed worthy of their contention.

They were near Cales when the orders were brought. Could it be the dictator's intention to give battle and avenge what he had failed to save? By midday they were mounted and threading the forest paths that led to their comrades — paths whence, from time to time, some vista in the woods disclosed the plain below, with here and there a column of smoke that made Sergius grind his teeth and clench his hands in impotent rage. Suddenly he drew rein, for a man, dressed in the coarse, gray tunic of a slave, had half run, half stumbled across his way. An instant more, and the fellow was struggling in the grasp of Decius, who had sprung to the ground.

"What now, forkbearer! what now, delight of the scourges!" cried the decurion. "Will you delay the march of a tribune of the Republic?"

"Pity me, master, pity me and let me go!" cried the man, still striving vainly to escape.

"Surely they are close behind me —"

"Who are behind you?" asked Sergius, sternly. "Speak and lie not, fool for Acheron!"

"They who are burning the farm."

Sergius' eyes glittered, and he leaned forward to catch the words, as he began to gather their import.

"Speak quickly, and you shall be safe," he said, in more reassuring tones. "Whose farm is it that is burning? Loose him, Marcus."

Released from the hands that held him, the fugitive seemed to waver for a moment between speech and flight. Perhaps exhaustion turned the balance, for, still panting for breath, he threw himself on his knees before Sergius' bridle and gasped: —

"My master's farm — a veteran of the first war — a centurion — the Numidians."

"Where is it? How many are there?"

The man pointed down the slope up which he had scrambled.

"I did not note their numbers, lord. Perhaps a hundred — perhaps more."

As he spoke, the sky began to brighten as with fire, and Sergius, wheeling his horse, urged him downward toward the plain. Decius was

by his side in an instant, and behind them came the cavalry at a speed that threatened to hurl them headlong to the foot of the rocky declivity. Joy and fury shone on the faces of the men: only Marcus Decius seemed troubled and abstracted.

"We shall be with them soon, my Marcus," cried Sergius, gayly, and then, noting the furrowed face of his first decurion: "Surely, Trasimenus has not cooled your heart. Take courage. There is no water here to chill you."

Decius flushed through the deep bronze of his skin.

"It is true that there is no water here, and blows might warm my blood. It was the command of the dictator that I thought of."

They had reached the level plain now. A cluster of burning buildings hardly a mile ahead marked their goal.

"And it is you, Marcus, who have been railing at those same commands?"

"I am an old soldier, my master. I growl, but I obey."

For answer, Sergius urged on his horse with knee and thong. Now they could distinguish dark shapes gliding hither and thither around the fires, and now they burst in upon a scene as of the orgies of demons.

Utterly unsuspecting of danger, the marauders had taken no precautions. Their wiry, little horses had been turned loose about the gardens, while the riders murdered and pillaged and ravished and destroyed. The worst was over now. Little remained of the buildings, save clay walls covered with plaster; dead bodies were scattered here and there; the women and such of the slaves as had not been slaughtered, together with the farm stock and other things of value, were gathered beyond the reach of the fires; while, bound high upon a rude cross before his own threshold, the master of the farm writhed amid flames that shot upward to lick his hands and face.

Then, in an instant, the scene was changed: the Roman horsemen burst in, and, frenzied by the spectacle before them, slew madly and fast. Hither and thither they swept, wherever the dusky figures sought to fly, and the thin, reed-like lances rose and plunged and rose again, shivering and dripping, from the bodies of their victims. But for their well-trained steeds, who came and knelt at their masters' calls, not one of the desert horsemen could have escaped, and, as it was, a mere dozen broke out from the carnage and scurried away, with the avengers in close and relentless pursuit. Marcus Decius

paused a moment before the cross and studied the torn frame and blackened skin of the man who hung there. Then, with a swift movement of his lance, he transfixed the quivering body, and, hardly catching the "Jove bless thee, comrade," and the sigh with which life escaped, he dashed on after the pursuing squadrons.

VI.

DISOBEDIENCE.

THAT the chase was doomed to be a vain one seemed apparent. Once mounted and urging on their steeds with the shrill, barbaric cries of the desert, Hannibal's light horsemen were safe from all ordinary pursuit. One after another of the Romans drew up his panting animal, and scarce half of their turmae pounded on.

Suddenly they saw the flying Numidians throw their horses upon their haunches. A moment of indecision followed, and then, while several darted off obliquely, the remainder, seven or eight in all, swung around and charged straight at the legionaries. At their head rode a giant, black as ebony save where goutts of red had splashed him with the hue of terror. His frizzly hair was caught up high and ornamented with a cluster of ostrich feathers, while with his right hand he drew javelin after javelin from the sheaf he carried in his left, and launched them with unerring aim at his former pursuers. Three had flown on their errands, two had

brought down a soldier each, quivered in the throat of Sergius' as the animal reared and went his rider with him, the assailant the line, and in a moment had gained the plain beyond. Once more he was for one short, thick-set rider, — the first decurion of the first turma overtake his troop.

Escape from such a pursuer was for the Numidian; but the fury of him, and, gnashing his white teeth the thick, black lips seemed to waver bent low amid his horse's man inarticulate cry, urged him straight on. His javelins had all been breaking through the Roman line; his heavy dagger was his only weapon. He came on, evaded the thrust of Decius' spear, and upon him. It was the small Roman that saved his life; the sword through the ox-hide, slightly gained, and, before the barbarian could withdraw it, the impact of the horses in full career had sent both men and animals to the plain in a floundering heap. Again the Numidian was quicker, and, gaining his feet, he sprang, weap-

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unless as he was, upon the decurion still struggling to untangle himself from his fallen horse. The buckler, with the African's knife thrust through it, had rolled away, and the possession of Decius' sword, which hung in its sheath upon his right thigh, became the object of the struggle. Perhaps the strength of the men was not very unequal; but the Roman, hardly free from his mount, was undermost and wounded, so that the result seemed hardly doubtful. The Numidian's charger had risen to its feet, and stood, with outstretched neck, whinnying softly, as if sharing in the excitement of the contest. Then the trampling of hoofs sounded in the ears of the straining combatants. Decius felt his adversary make a convulsive effort as if to free himself, and then a gush of something warm came into the Roman's face, and his foe sank down upon him, limp and helpless. With a last effort of his spent strength, he pushed the twitching body aside, and, staggering to his feet, saw Sergius standing beside him, with a dripping sword in his hand, and the bridle of Titus Icilius', the flag-bearer's, horse thrown over his left arm.

Remounting, they rode slowly back to their troop, and then the cause of the strange bold-

ness of the fugitives was disclosed. Advancing across the plain directly in the path of their flight came four hundred of the allied cavalry, whom the dictator had sent out to reconnoitre, and, caught thus between two lines, the Numidians had, for the most part, chosen to take their chances against the weaker force. Not one of the marauders was alive, but they had sold their lives dearly; for a dozen of the Romans also were dead, and a score more showed wounds that marked this last spasm of barbarian frenzy.

While the men talked together, Sergius sought the præfect of the new detachment, a Hostilian of the family of Mancinus, whom he recalled among the young hot-heads that formed the party of the master-of-the-horse, and declaimed against the policy of Fabius as cowardly and base. He found him in the best possible humour, laughing and making coarse jests amid a circle of decurions and optios — as rude a Roman as marched with the standards, yet able, when occasion demanded, to play the man of fashion who had spent a year at Athens. The latter mood fell upon him when he descried Sergius. He came forward to meet him.

“Health to you, my Lucius!” he cried.

"Surely the gods have held you in especial favour this day. I am told you have cut up a few squadrons of this African offal."

"With your timely aid," replied Sergius, bowing.

"I but made the hares double to your coursing," said Hostilius, carelessly; "and they tell me you have won both the spolia opima and a civic crown. That is a great deal for one day — and under a peaceful dictator."

Sergius flushed.

"I shall not claim them," he said. "Doubtless, Decius would have both slain the fellow and saved himself had I not come up —"

"No modesty! no modesty!" cried Hostilius, gayly. "I assure you it is even less Greek than Roman in these days. Lo! now, I myself will claim both for you at Rome, if only to show that I do not grudge you your share of the carrion. Perhaps such honours will not prejudice you in a certain house on the Palatine," he added, slyly. "But come! you and I shall join our forces and raid together. We have sent two hundred to Acheron since we left the camp, and birds have been singing on our left all the morning."

"Where is the dictator now?" asked Sergius,

"In his tent, of course," replied the other,

scornfully. "And no one cares where that may be."

"And you?"

"Oh! he was persuaded at last to risk a scouting party, and, at the request of the brave Minucius, he gave the command to me with strict injunctions to use only my eyes. Well, I have used them so sharply that my hands, too, have been full," and Hostilius laughed. "There are some five hundred of the cross-food that have evaded me thus far. We shall catch them now, though, and, together, it will be easy for us to prevail."

Sergius was silent. To make a dash from the heights in defence of allies dying in his sight, was one thing; to deliberately join this insubordinate in turning a reconnaissance into a raid, was another and much more serious matter.

The præfect noted his hesitation, and a slight frown chased the smile from his lips.

"Or perhaps you prefer to obey the old woman's orders," he added, "and keep your couch warm. Well, our men and horses are fed by this time, and I am off. If you are a Roman, I greet you to ride with me; if you fear robbers or the axe that smote Titus Manlius, why, I will bid you farewell and ride alone."

"Where do you set your course?" queried Sergius, with a vague hope of at least seeming to combine inclination with duty.

"Toward the enemy," replied the other, shortly. "Does not the direction please you?" and he turned to his horse.

Sergius' brow clouded. His blood was hot with the conflict just finished. Youth, courage—all combined to turn him from obedience; but obedience bade fair to conquer, when Marcia's laugh rang in his ears, and he could hear her gravely complimenting his prudence and discoursing on the rare value of docility in a husband. Besides, what did it all matter? Had he not said that he sought death? and, surely, the way it came soonest was the best.

Placing his hand upon his horse's withers, he vaulted upon its back, before the animal had time to kneel, and a moment later was beside Hostilius.

"By Hercules!" exclaimed the latter; "I am glad you are here. Even in these days of strange things, I would have found it difficult to imagine that a Sergian could be a coward."

"And now," cried Sergius, "you will only have to imagine him a fool. So be it, and let the cost of his life pay for his folly."

"Jupiter avert the omen!" exclaimed Hostilius, shuddering, and then, turning to his trumpeter, he bade him give the signal for the march.

It was a desolate country—the fair plains of Campania through which they rode. Here and there a cluster of blackened ruins, here and there things that were once men, fruit trees cut down, vines uprooted, corn-fields reaped with the sword; while far away upon the horizon smoky columns curled up to show that the work of devastation still went on.

"May Mavers curse him—curse him forever!" cried Hostilius, grinding his teeth in rage at each new manifestation of the enemy's handiwork. "Could the most disastrous battle be worse than this?"

Sergius was silent. In a way his feelings went out to meet those of his companion; but the dictator had trusted him, and he had disobeyed, and, for all his disobedience, his soldier's instinct told him that the dictator was right.

Hostilius eyed him sharply and suspiciously, as if trying to divine his thoughts.

"If you regret—" he began.

Suddenly a decurion of the allies dashed up beside them.

"Look!" he cried, pointing toward the east.
"There is carrion for the wolves."

Both leaders turned at the words.

Far out across the plain was what seemed at first sight like a clump of dark foliage, save that it moved and changed shape too much.

"Numidians!" exclaimed the decurion, following his finger with his speech, while the veins in Hostilius' forehead began to swell and grow dark.

"The signal! Let it be given," he cried to his officer, and, turning, he dug his knees into his horse's sides and galloped toward the distant quarry. A moment later the cavalry wheeled at the trumpet call, and, in some disorder but full of eagerness, began the pursuit of their leader.

As for Sergius, he, too, gave order and rein, though more deliberately, and his troop followed the cavalry of the allies in somewhat better array. By his side galloped Decius with an expression hard to analyze upon his weather-beaten face.

Sergius glanced at the old soldier from time to time with a look of inquiry and concern. At last he ventured to question his grim mentor.

"Is it well or ill, Marcus?"

"Ill for you that command, well for me who

obey," growled the other, and Sergius flushed and was silent.

"Shall we catch them?" he asked, a few moments later, for the clump of Numidians, who had sat motionless upon their horses until the Romans covered half the intervening distance, had now wheeled for flight.

"If they be too strong for us, we shall catch them," replied Decius. "It is as they will."

And now it became apparent that the marauders were far inferior in numbers to the assailants, and that they recognized the fact; for flight and pursuit began in earnest. Horses were urged to higher speed. At one moment the Numidians seemed to be holding their distance; at another, the Romans gained slightly but unmistakably. All order of detachments and *turmæ* was soon lost; Romans and allies, officers and men, were mingled together in a straggling mass, with naught but the eagerness of the riders and the speed of their animals to marshal them. Only Decius continued to pound along, with his horse's nose at his tribune's elbow. The thunder of many hundred hoofs rolled across the plain.

"By Hercules! we shall do it!" cried Sergius, in whom ardour of the chase had put to

flight all sentiments of regret or doubt. "Do you not see we are gaining?"

"They ride silently yet," said Decius. "It is but knee-speed with them. Wait till they cry out to their horses, and we shall see."

Suddenly, as if to supplement the words, a single shrill cry, half whistle, half scream, rose up ahead. Had they been closer, they might have noted the pricking ears of the desert steeds; but this much they saw:—one horse and rider darting out of the press, like arrow from bow, and scurrying away over the plain as if their former gait had been but a hand-gallop.

An instant of misgiving came to some few of the Romans, who were not blind to everything but the excitement of the moment, but they, like the rest, only plied knee and thong the harder, and the episode of the single rider was forgotten by all save Marcus Decius and Sergius.

"It is a trap, master," said the former, with an inquiring glance at his leader.

Sergius bowed his head, and his face was troubled, as he replied:—

"I know it, my Marcus, but we cannot turn back now. I have accepted the feast: therefore I must recline until my host gives the signal to rise. I pray you pardon me."

By a quick movement Decius urged his horse a stride ahead of the tribune's, that he might the better hide his emotion; at the same time growling:—

“I pardon you?—and for the chance of a blow at the scum? I thank you many times.”

And now, from the plain ahead rose a low range of rolling hills over which a light cloud seemed to hover. Was it the ascent that wearied the horses of the Numidians? Surely the space between pursuers and pursued was lessening rapidly, and Hostilius leaned far forward, shaking his spear and calling upon his men for a renewed effort.

“Now! now!” he cried. “See! they are spent! Up with them ere they top the hill!”

But the Numidians gained the sought-for ridge, if only by a few spear-lengths' lead, and the cloud, now close ahead, hung so dense that there were those who thought it the smoke of another farm. Decius' eyes seemed set in a dazed stare. There was too much red in that cloud, and yet it was not the red of fire, and it was too light and too thin for smoke. He knew it; he had known it all along, but what did it matter? The last Numidian had disappeared down the opposite slope—no! surely they had turned again, and in a longer line—

a thicker one; and the light javelins and naked black bodies had become long, stout spears and glittering corselets, while at their head rode a slender man with forked beard, and his black eyes seemed to burn in his head like coals. So, with one barbaric roar, the whole array poured down over the allied cavalry, and these were like the dust of the trampled field.

VII.

PUNISHMENT.

SERGIVS hardly knew what was happening. He was conscious that the stride of his horse had been checked by a dense mass of plunging animals in front — a mass that grew more dense and more tangled with every instant. Those behind were still endeavouring to press forward, and those in front were hurled back upon them or were striving frantically to break through the rearmost squadrons and escape; while, shrill above the clash of arms and the shouts and screams, rose a name that Sergivs found himself listening to with a sort of curious interest.

“Maharbal! Maharbal!” came the cry, nearer and nearer.

At the first moment of the check, Marcus Decius had pushed the sturdy horse that he rode well to the fore. He saw Hostilius riding back, waving one arm and crying out incoherent words: his spear was gone, and the head of a Spaniard's lance had been thrust through his shoulder and broken off, so that a third of the shaft hung from the wound.

Then what had happened and the hopelessness of it all became apparent. Like the veriest fools they had ridden into the snare, and Maharbal, the Carthaginian, with at least two thousand Spanish and African horsemen, was thundering on their front and flanks: their front—but in a moment, their rear; for now those who had not been ridden down at the first onset or become inextricably entangled with their fellows broke away over the plain, carrying their officers with them in a mad frenzy of flight; while other Numidians—fresh riders on fresh steeds—urged the pursuit and smote down the hindermost.

Decius found himself riding in the middle of the press. His face was as imperturbable as ever, though he glanced over his shoulder from time to time as if to note how much nearer death had come. Sergius galloped close behind him, careless and abstracted, his rein lying loose on his charger's steaming neck. Then, of a sudden, a resolve seemed to come to him. Straightening himself, he urged the weary horse forward through the fugitives till he drew up even with Hostilius, who, still frantic with panic, was now swaying in his saddle from the pain and loss of blood.

Sergius leaned over and laid his hand upon

the other's arm, and Hostilius started as if he had touched a serpent. Then he became calmer, and a troubled look was in the eyes that sought the tribune's face.

"Yes, I know," he said at last, speaking hurriedly and in odd, strained accents. "I led you into it, and now I am flying."

"Let us turn back," said Sergius, mildly. "I do not reproach you, but let us turn back. Surely it is better than the rods and axe."

Hostilius shuddered, and, at that moment, Decius, who had overtaken them, broke in with:—

"By Hercules! there is no fear of those. They cut us down in flight. The choice is, shall we have it in the face or between the shoulders."

"By the gods of Rome, then!" shouted the præfect, suddenly reining up, while Sergius and Decius swung their horses in short circles.

There was no trumpet to give the signal, and the little cavalry banner had gone down long ago; but such was the force of Roman training that nearly all of Sergius' men and half of the allies turned in mid-panic with their leaders. To make head, much less to form was impossible, for the foremost of the enemy were well mingled with the rearmost fugitives. As Decius had said, it was only a choice of deaths: the

one swift and honourable, the other more lingering, but none the less inevitable.

Almost in a moment it was over. Between two and three hundred of the united detachments had fallen already, and the hundred or so that now sought to face about, went down in a crushed and bleeding mass under the thousands of hoofs that overwhelmed them. Such was the weight and impetus of the pursuing force that there was no time even to strike, and most of the victims fell unwounded by spear or javelin. Sergius was vaguely conscious that he had seen the præfect cloven through the head by the short, swordlike Numidian knife, his own horse seemed to collapse under him, and that was the end.

Then he knew that it was dark and cold and that there was a howling in the air, as of beasts of prey, and the shadow of a man fell across him, for the moon was in the heavens, and the man was cursing by all the gods of the Capitol.

Gradually consciousness returned, and he recalled, incident by incident, the happenings of the past day. He had been lying still, thus far, without further wish than to look up at the stars and think and listen to what he now knew was the distant howling of wolves and the nearer curses of Marcus Decius. At last he

stirred slightly, and the decurion turned and looked down.

"Do you live, master?"

"Yes, truly," replied Sergius; "unless you chance to be a shade."

Then he struggled to his feet, and the two gazed silently at each other and around them. All about, in the moonlight, lay the bodies of horses and men, the latter glittering in their white tunics, save here and there an officer whose helmet and breastplate had seemed to mark out his corpse for stripping and nameless desecrations. Sergius' head-piece was gone, but he glanced at his own corselet and then at Decius.

"We were buried together under a heap of dead," said the latter, in answer to the unasked query. "They made haste in their spoiling; and, when they had gone, I drew myself free and found you: the wolves are feasting well to-night; can you walk?"

Sergius moved stiffly a few steps. He felt bruised from head to foot, and one arm hung useless from a dislocated shoulder, but he found no wound. Decius had not escaped so lightly. Besides the gash he had received earlier in the day, he had been cut again across the forehead, but his prodigious strength seemed to have inexhaustible resources to draw upon.

"Come," he said. "We must go southward as quickly as possible. Sergius still walked slowly about, glancing at one corpse after another, until the decurion, at last divining his thought, broke in roughly:—

"Come! The wolves must provide him sepulchre as they will do for better men. What would he have? The she-wolf suckled the twins. Let Hostilius pay the debt by feeding the she-wolf's cubs. By Hercules! other sepulchre for him means need of one for ourselves."

So speaking, he at last drew Sergius away, and they began their weary tramp across the field.

"If I could have seen but one pulse-eater among the slain," said the tribune, after they had gone some distance in silence.

"I know of one that should be dead," remarked Decius, grimly, "if a spear through his midriff be enough for him. Truly the ancient shafts are useless in close fight, save for a single thrust. I, for one, welcome the Greek equipment—and the sooner the better."

Suddenly Sergius stopped and laid his hand upon his comrade's arm.

"Look!" he said.

A long, low rampart seemed to rise up from the plain two hundred yards ahead.

"Their camp," said the decurion, after a short pause, "and deserted. Let us go forward cautiously; perhaps we shall find food."

Step by step they crept up, walking faster and more erect as they drew nearer and as the evidence that life was not there became more apparent.

"They have left it only to-night," said Decius, clambering up the mound of earth and sniffing the air. "Had it been a day old, we should have smelt it long ago, though the wind blows from us."

Then, as they descended and traversed the silent lanes, a puzzled expression came to his face, and he halted from time to time.

Sergius eyed him inquiringly.

"Do you not smell fresh blood?" said the veteran, at last. "I remember when we marched with Lucius Æmilius, after the Gauls had beaten the prætor's army at Clusium. There were ten thousand men just slain, and the air was salt like the sea — by Jupiter! What is this?"

Resuming their advance, they had come upon a space of open ground near the centre of the camp, doubtless the spot reserved for a market; but what meat was it that cumbered the shambles, without buyer or seller? Piled in ghastly heaps, or covering the ground two and three

deep, lay a fresh-reaped harvest of corpses, stripped, distorted, gleaming in the moonlight. Could it be that the camp had been taken? But these were no African dead, nor yet was this a Roman camp. There was a set deliberation, too, about the slaughter, that told no tale of battle.

Suddenly Decius cried out and, stooping down, raised the hands of one of the victims — hands upon which the shackles still hung.

“Slaves,” murmured Sergius; “but why —”

“Say, rather, prisoners,” said the centurion, grimly.

Sergius struck his thigh. It was all clear to him now.

“May the plague fall upon him! may he go to a thousand crosses! Do you not see? He is *escaping*. He has made for the passes and slain his prisoners, that they may not hamper his march. Who knows but that by now he is on the road to Rome? Gods! This was Hostilius’ duty and mine, and we wasted our time and our men on a few score of miserable Numidians. Come, my Marcus, come: there are no such things as wounds or weariness or caution. We must reach the dictator at once, and may the gods grant that it be not too late!”

Marcus Decius had been gazing gloomily at the young man, as the words burst from his lips.

"Where shall we go, and how?" he said, with a despairing gesture.

"On our feet," cried Sergius. "Did I not say that weariness and wounds were not? It is for the life of the Republic: I to the camp near Casilinum; you to Tarracina. They will march by the Appian or by the Latin Way, if they strike for Rome. If not, the plan may not be fatal.

Decius yielded to the decision of his companion, and, with hasty fingers, they unlaced each other's corselets and hurried out of the camp, each to run his race with what strength remained. The last clasp of hands had been given and received, when, far away on the hills east and northeast, the quick eye of Sergius caught the gleam of a rapidly moving torch: then another and another and another seemed to flame out in the night, like stars when the moon has failed, until the whole range of heights blazed with fires that flashed and danced and crossed and recrossed each other in mad confusion, as if all the thronging bacchanals of Greece had assembled for one frenzied orgy.

Dazed and confounded by the spectacle, as

grand as it was weird and unexplainable, they stood spell-bound, powerless each to take the first stride. Decius, the older man, the veteran, turned to his companion, yielding that unconscious homage to birth and rank and education, that comes in the presence of unknown perils. No experience of war could help him here, and his mind leaped at once to the supernatural for an explanation. As for the tribune, such thoughts, at least, had not occurred to him. Greek scepticism had already gained too strong a hold upon young Romans of rank, to let them regard the theology of the State other than as a machinery devised by wise men to control an ignorant rabble. Besides, his mind had taken another direction from the discovery of the slaughter of the prisoners, and, humanlike, it ran on in its channel, right or wrong.

Decius was trembling violently.

"Truly, master, the gods of Carthage are loose to-night," said he.

There was even a little of contempt in the glance with which Sergius noted the abject terror of the sturdy veteran. Utterly at a loss to explain the apparitions, he never doubted for a moment but that they were the product of some human wile.

"Come," he said shortly. "The gods of

Carthage have favoured us in lighting the way. First of all, we shall go together and learn the truth." Without waiting for a reply, he set off, at an easy, loping gait, in the direction of the strange fires. Decius followed, as he would have followed through the portals of Avernus.

The distance to the heights was not great, — four or five miles at the utmost, — but half an hour had passed, and still the spectacle, wilder and more brilliant than ever, remained unexplained. For a stretch of miles, the hills above, beyond, and below were all ablaze with rushing flames that seemed guided by no sentient agency; then, suddenly, a single torch glanced out from a small grove of trees a short distance ahead and darted diagonally across their path. Decius stopped for an instant, with trembling knees; but Sergius bounded forward to intercept the torch-bearer, and the veteran followed from sheer shame.

Up, down to the ground, up again, and then around in frantic waving circles swept the flame: a mad bellowing rolled through the night, until the tribune himself almost checked his stride in awe-struck wonder. The next instant the torch, if torch it was, seemed to flounder to the earth, from which it rose again and came driving directly toward him, explained

at last, — an ox with a great bundle of blazing fagots fastened between its horns, blinded, frantic with pain and terror.

Sergius sprang aside, as the beast dashed by; but Decius, roused once more to the possibility of independent thought and action, stepped toward it and, as it passed, plunged his sword between its heaving ribs.

“What now, my master?” he said, flushing with shame at his fears of the last hour — perhaps the bravest hour of his life. “Does the lying Carthaginian seek to terrify Quintus Fabius, the dictator, as he terrified Marcus Decius, the decurion?”

“Yes, truly,” replied Sergius, gloomily; “and he will succeed even better. No general, and, least of all, ours, would lead out his army in the night against such a spectacle. Come, it is necessary that we should reach the camp,” and, turning once again, they fell to running in a more southern direction, where a dim glow in the sky seemed to tell of the watch-fires of an army.

At first no sound broke the stillness of the night, save the laboured breathing of the weary runners and the strokes of their leathern cothurni upon the hard ground; but soon other noises came to mingle with these and,

at last, to drown them: the lowing of thousands of cattle, now scattered far and wide over the plain and hillsides, and then the distant clash of arms and the cries of combatants.

Day began to dawn, just as the fugitives came in sight of the Roman camp with the army drawn up behind its ramparts, waiting for they knew not what. Here and there upon the heights they could see small bodies of legionaries who defended themselves against light troops of the enemy, until overwhelmed by the Spanish infantry that scaled the hills and cut them to pieces; while to every prayer that the dictator should march out to their support, he returned one grim answer.

"They deserted their posts in the passes. Rome needs not such soldiers."

So, company by company, the guards of the defiles, terrified or lured away to the ridges by the ruse of the cattle and the blazing fagots, fell ingloriously before their comrades' eyes, as being men not worth the effort to succour. The rear-guard of the invaders had already made its way through the pass, while the Carthaginian van was well on into the valley of the Volturnus. Now, too, the African light troops disappeared, and, at last, the white tunics of the Spaniards, gay with their purple borders,

glittered for a moment on the hilltops, and then, their work of death completed, sank away behind the ridges to fall back and join their comrades in a march of new destruction through a new country.

VIII.

DISGRACE.

WHILE these things were happening, for the most part in the sight of all, Sergius had been able to gain a moment's speech with the dictator. Forcing his way through the crowd of tribunes and officers who thronged the prætorium, he had found Fabius seated before his tent, and had told his story in the fewest words possible.

Naked but for his torn tunic and his cothurni, covered from head to foot with blood and mire, his left arm hanging useless, and his face like the face of a dead man, neither his miserable plight nor his story brought softness to the stern lips and brow of the general.

"You have come to tell me this?" he said, when the other had finished speaking. "Do I not know it *now*?" and he pointed to the heights. Then he turned away and spoke with some one at his side, while Sergius stood, with downcast eyes, swaying and scarcely able to keep his feet.

Among those around him his fate seemed hardly a matter of conjecture, but a thrill went through the company when Minucius, who had been vainly urging the dictator to support the guards of the passes, now turned away in disgust, and, noting the disgraced officer, as if for the first time, cried out in a loud voice:—

“What, my friend! have not the lictors attended to you, yet, for venturing to play the man?”

Sergius felt the added danger to which the master-of-the-horse had exposed him by using his insubordination to point such a moral to his commander; but the face of the dictator gave no sign that he had even heard the taunting challenge. Calmly he gave his orders for cautious scouting, for breaking camp, and for the army to resume its patient march of observation, along the flank of the retiring foe. Then, when one after another had retired to fulfil his commands, he turned again to the waiting tribune.

“I have been considering your fault,” he said slowly, “and I had marked you out as a much needed victim for the rods and axe. Go to my master-of-the-horse and thank him for your life. His taunt was doubtless meant to destroy you, in order that he might play the demagogue

over your fate. I accept it as a challenge to my self-control. It is more necessary that I should show myself wise and forbearing than that one fool should perish for his folly. Go back to Rome, and tell them that I have many soldiers who can fight, and that I want only those who can obey."

Utterly exhausted, Sergius struggled vainly to withstand this last, crushing blow. His composure was unequal to the task, and, sinking upon his knees, as the dictator turned toward the tent, he could only stretch out one hand and murmur:—

"The axe, my master; I pray you, the axe."

Fabius paused a moment and eyed him grimly. Then his rugged, weary face softened slightly.

"I trusted you," he said. "Could you not trust me for a little while? But go to Rome, as I bade you—only there shall others go with you, and you shall bear for your message, instead of that one, this: that there is no room for wounded men in my camp."

"But I shall be well in two days—in one—I am well now if you say it."

Fabius shook his head slowly.

"Æsculapius has not been unhonoured by me," he said, "and he has told me that you

will be but a burden for many days. For this reason go to Rome, and for two others that you shall not tell of: one, for punishment because you could not obey, and one, because the time will come soon when Rome shall need even the men who can only fight."

Sergius saw the hopelessness of struggling against his softened fate, bitter though it was. Open disgrace, indeed, had been turned aside; but, on the other hand, he was doomed to inaction during times when all Rome longed only to strike, and he could not but feel that he had fallen far in the estimation of his general.

IX.

HOME.

THE Appian Way was still safe, even from the chance of Numidian foray, and it was along its lava-paved level that the long convoy of sick and wounded writhed slowly northward that afternoon.

Half reclining in the rude chariot, each jolt of which brought agony to his injured shoulder, Sergius watched, with far deeper pain than that of body, the last troop of allied horse winding up the pass toward Allifæ: the rear-guard of Rome's line of march. Then he fell to brooding upon his fate, while the night followed the day and the day the night, and still the dreary, groaning caravan dragged on, resting only during the heated hours.

On, over the Liris at Minturnæ, upward, over the mountains behind Tarracina and descending again into the Pontine plain; through the shady groves of Arician ilex that crown the Alban Hills, down to Bovillæ, and then away across the Campagna to Rome—a marvel

of deep cuttings through the hills, — a marvel of giant superstructures over valleys, — the Appian, the Queen of Ways.

There were long, green ridges now, swelling from the plain and breaking away into little rocky cliffs tufted with wild fig trees: sluggish streams wound down from the east where, far away, loomed the snow-tipped summits of Apennine, while toward the west the sky reflected a brighter light from the sea that glittered beneath it.

At last the eyes of the vanguard of weary wayfarers could descry, through the morning mists, the crowned cluster of hills that was to be a crown to all the world. Nearer they came and yet nearer, through the vineyards and cornfields of the Campagna — the southern Campagna teeming with its herds of mouse-coloured cattle, whose great, stupid eyes were only less stupidly beautiful than those of the rustics that watched over their grazings.

And now wounds and sickness were, for the moment, forgotten, as man pointed out to man this and that landmark of home: temples on this hill and on that; Diana on the Aventine, the hill of the people; Jupiter Stator on the Palatine; the grim mass of the citadel above the rock of Tarpeia; the great quadriga that surmounted

the greatest fane of all — the house of Capitoline Jove. To the right of these were the clustered oaks of the Cælian Mount, while, farthest away, but highest of all, the white banner fluttering from the heights of Janiculum told them that the city was still safe, still unassailed. They were passing where the road was bordered by its houses of the dead; tombs of the great families, above which the funereal cypresses bent their heads and shed peace and shade alike over the dead and the living. The hum of the city came to their ears, and, as the convoy drew nearer to the Capenian Gate, the throng, pouring out to meet them, grew thicker and more dense, blocking the way until the cavalry of the escort cleared it with their spear-butts. Then the press divided, running along on both sides of the carriages, in two fast-filling streams whose murmurs swelled into a very torrent's roar of questions and prayers for news of the general and the army.

"Was Hannibal beaten? Had he been slain, or was he waiting in chains to grace the Fabian triumph? Was it true that he measured twice the height of common men, and that a single eye blazed cyclops-like in the middle of his forehead? How many elephants would be seen in the triumph?"

Such and a hundred queries, equally wild, assailed the escort and the occupants of the wagons; for this was the rabble: poor citizens, freedmen, slaves, for whom no story of Hannibal and Carthage was too improbable. Nevertheless Sergius imagined he could discern a spirit of irony underlying much that he heard.

When they had reached the low eminence that, crowned by the Temple of Mars, faced the city gate, he bade the attendants help him descend from the army carriage, that he might wait the coming of his slaves with a litter. A messenger was soon found, and hurried off, charged with necessary directions.

The crowd had rolled on through the gate, together with the convoy, and the sick man was left alone save for the attendants of the temple in whose care he had placed himself. Day by day, as he had jolted along his journey, he had felt the fever coming on—fever born of his injury and the terrible strain to which he had been subjected: now it was only necessary to reach his home and rest. Last of his race but for two older sisters who had married several years since, the spacious mansion of the family of Fidenas was his alone, with its slaves and its ancestral masks and its cool courts and its outlook over the seething Forum up to the oppo-

site heights of the Capitol. There he would find care and comfort for the body if not for the soul.

And now the patter of running feet sounded from the pavement below. They were come, at last, with the litter, and Sergius, entering it, was borne swiftly through the gate, on, between the tall houses that backed up against the hills, turning soon to the left into the New Way; on, past the altar of Hercules in the cattle market, past the Temple of Vesta, along the Comitia, and into the Sacred Way by the front of the Curia. Thence they swung westward to the Roman Gate, the gate in the ancient Wall of the City of Romulus that fenced the Palatine alone, — a stately entrance, now, to the residence portion of the city most favoured by the great families. Near by stood the house that marked the ending of the journey, bustling with its slaves and bright with a hundred lamps; while the physician, an old freedman of the tribune's father, stood upon the threshold to greet and care for his late master's son.

Gravely shaking his head at the discouraging aspect of the invalid and muttering to himself in Greek, for he was born in Rhodes, he led the way back to the great hall between the peristyle and the garden.

"Here, master," he said, "I have caused your couch to be laid, at the moment I learned of your arrival and condition. You observe, the air and light will be better than in your apartment, and the space better calculated for those whose duty it shall be to minister to you, until the divine Æsculapius and Apollo's self unite to grant success to my efforts."

"It is well, Agathocles," said Sergius, wearily, "and I thank you."

His voice seemed to die away with the last words, and a sort of stupor fell over him. Agathocles watched him closely, as he lay upon the couch, noted the heavy breathing, and drew his brows together with a deep frown. Behind him a group of the household slaves whispered together and cast frightened glances, now at their master, now at the disciple of the healing art; for Sergius had been brought up among them, and the terms of their service were neither heavy nor harsh. Then the surgeon set to work examining the shoulder, nodding his head to observe that the bone had been replaced in its socket, but waxing troubled again over the inflammation and swelling that told the story of torn tendons and blood-vessels too long neglected, and of the hardships of the journey. Slaves were sent scurrying, in this direction

and that, to compound lotions and spread poultices, while Agathocles himself proceeded to the ostentatious mixing of some cooling draught calculated to ward off, if possible, the fever that was already claiming its sway.

X.

CONVALESCENCE.

THE many weeks of hovering between life and death that followed these days were a dense blank to Sergius. First, there was his injury, more serious than he had imagined, and the fever that had followed it, complicated again by the malaria of the marshes through which he had journeyed in so vulnerable a plight. Then came other weeks of such lassitude that he had neither power nor desire to learn of the world to which he felt himself slowly returning, as did Æneas from the realms of Pluto. There were times when he had been vaguely conscious of whisperings around his couch upon subjects that should have interested him and did not. Was it his fault? or had everything become commonplace and of no account?

At last there came a time of convalescence. His haggard face frightened him when he looked at it in the bronze mirror; but the air of the winter was fresh and keen, bringing health and life to the mind, if not entirely to the

body. So, lying one day in the entrance hall and gazing out over the Forum below, he turned to Agathocles, who sat close by.

"And now you shall tell me," he began, "of the things that have happened while I have lain here, helpless as a bag of corn in the granary, and of even less importance."

"You mistake, my master," replied the physician, quickly. "Surely you must know that your condition has been a matter of deep anxiety to many, both within and without your walls."

"Within, perhaps, yes," said Sergius, slowly. "I treat them well, and such of them as do not get freedom by my will would doubtless find harder masters in Sabinus and Camerinus. My sisters' husbands are patricians of the old school. As for without,—am I not a man useless in times of action?—well-nigh disgraced?—"

Agathocles hastened to interrupt:—

"Ah! my master, you do not know. Could you but see the crowd of clients who have gathered at your door each morning, waiting for it to creak upon the pivots, and, later in the day, such of your friends as were not away with the army—ay," he continued, with a sharp glance at the invalid, "and a pretty female slave who

has come at each nightfall and has questioned the doorkeeper."

The strong desire to hear of two things had come into Sergius' mind while the physician was speaking. He must learn about this female slave who had inquired so assiduously, and he must hear of the army, the war, the Republic; for these last three were really but one. After something of an effort, and not without a certain sentiment of self-approval, he said:—

"Let me hear of friends later, my Agathocles. Tell me now of the war."

There was a troubled expression in the physician's eyes, but he answered volubly:—

"It progresses famously, in Spain, my master. Oh!—ay—famously. Their fleet has been swept from the seas, and Scipio slays and drives them as he wills. Doubtless by now they are all back in Africa—"

"Not of Spain," interrupted Sergius, as the narrator caught his breath. "Tell me of Italy, of Hannibal and Fabius. Have the standards opposed each other?"

"They say Hannibal is in winter quarters at Geronium, and the consuls watch him," began Agathocles, in more subdued tones.

"Tell me of Fabius. Tell me of what has happened—all, do you hear?" cried Sergius,

raising himself impatiently on one elbow. "If your story seems to lack coherence and truth, I swear to you that I will go down into the Forum at once and learn what I wish."

Thus adjured, the physician answered, but with evident reluctance:—

"Truly, my master, all things have not been as we might wish, and yet they could easily have run worse. When your dictator let the invaders out of Campania, there was much complaint among the people that he was protracting the war for his own advantage; but when he came to Rome for the sacrifices and left Minucius in command, with orders not to engage, and when the master-of-the-horse, as some say, evading the orders, fought and gained an advantage, then, you may believe me, the city was in a turmoil; nor were there wanting friends of Minucius and emissaries from his camp to sound his praises as a general and decry the dictator and his policy, not to say his courage and his honesty."

"I warrant," said Sergius, gloomily, "that every pot-house politician from the Etruscan Street was declaiming on how much better *he* could command than could Quintus Fabius."

"Until at last," went on Agathocles, "Marcus Metilius —"

"The tribune?—a corrupt knave!" broke in Sergius.

"Surely; yes. Well, this Marcus Metilius made a speech —"

"Full of rank demagoguery, I warrant."

"Surely, and saying that it was intolerable for Minucius, who was the only man who could fight, to be put under guard lest he beat the enemy; intolerable that the territory of the allies should have been given up to ravage, while the dictator protected his own farm with the legions of the Republic; and, finally, proposing, as a most moderate measure, that Minucius, the victor, should be given equal command over the army with Fabius the laggard."

"Unprecedented impudence!" murmured Sergius, "and what said the dictator?"

"He did not trouble to go near the Comitia, and even in the Senate they did not like to hear his praises of Hannibal and his troops, or listen favourably when he spoke doubtfully concerning the magnitude of Minucius' victory and claimed that, even were it all true, the master-of-the-horse should be called to account for his insubordination. So, after he had lauded prudence and supported his own policy, and after Marcus Atilius Regulus was elected consul, the dictator

departed for the army, in the night, and left them to do as they pleased."

"They passed the law?" asked Sergius, bitterly.

"It hung in doubt for some time," went on Agathocles; "for, though many favoured, few were disposed to advance such a measure, until Caius Terentius Varro, who was prætor last year—"

"The butcher's son," commented Sergius. "*You* know, my Agathocles, how demagogues and tyrants crushed out the life of your Hellas. We have yet to see the same ruin fall upon Rome, and from the same cause: first, an ungovernable rabble, stirred up by the ignorant and vicious, and then a king, and then a foreign conqueror. Flaminius lost one army, Minucius will doubtless lose another, while Metilius and Varro are well able to lose whatever may remain. Pah! Why did you not let me finish my journey to Acheron? This is no city for men whose fathers were able to teach them about war and honour. He whose tongue is most ready to lie about the noble and the rich is counted on to wield the sword best against an enemy. Well, —speak on; and what happened next?"

"As you say," continued the physician, "the measure was passed; but when Minucius desired

that he and the dictator should command on alternate days, Fabius would only consent to a division of the army."

"Gods!" exclaimed Sergius. "Two legions apiece! That must have been rare sport for Hannibal."

"Truly, yes; but it resulted well, for, to shorten the tale, the Carthaginian trapped Minucius through his rashness, and was about to cut him to pieces, when the dictator, who had foreseen all this, came up and saved what was left; whereupon the master-of-the-horse marched to the general's camp, and, saluting him as 'father' and 'saviour,' surrendered his equal command, after having directed his soldiers, also, to greet the others as patrons —"

"That, at least, was well done," said Sergius, nodding; "worthy of a man better born than Minucius. I do him honour for learning from experience. Metilius or Varro could not have done it."

"And, now," continued Agathocles, "both the dictator and the master-of-the-horse have given up their commands, the time of their appointments expiring, and the army is in winter quarters under the consuls."

"Servilius and Atilius?"

"Truly."

"And the elections?"

"Are falling due."

"Who sue for the consulship?"

Agathocles hesitated and placed his fingers upon the patient's pulse.

"I have told you enough for the day —"

"Who are candidates?" reiterated Sergius, leaning forward impatiently.

"They say that Varro —" began Agathocles.

But the tribune had sprung to his feet. Then, as he swayed a moment from weakness, leaning back against the couch, he raised both hands and cried out: —

"Have they gone mad? The butcher's son! — the bearer of his father's wares, to command against Hannibal! Do you think the Carthaginian a bullock to stand still and stupid, while this soldier of the shambles swings the axe? Gods! They will learn their error — only *we* must pay the price, together with the rabble that owe it. Gods! Was not the lesson of Flaminius enough for these drinkers of vinegar-water? This will be great news for them on the Megalia."

Then, seeming to gain strength from his excitement, he strode up and down the atrium, while the physician watched him anxiously but without venturing to interfere.

It was the doorkeeper's attendant that broke in upon the scene, pausing a moment in doubt, as his eyes followed his master's rapid strides. Finally, approaching Agathocles, he plucked him by the sleeve and whispered :—

“The woman desires to know of the health of my lord.”

Before the physician could answer, Sergius had caught the words, and, wheeling about, faced the boy.

“What woman and where?” he asked.

“The gray stole; the slave woman who inquires for you. She waits her answer at the door,” said the boy, his tongue loosened by the question.

“Let her come to me,” commanded Sergius, and he threw himself down upon the deeply cushioned seat of a marble chair. Agathocles stood at his elbow, with an expression of anxiety on his face, and, in a moment more, the girl entered.

Muffled almost to the eyes, she glided forward, and the voice that addressed him was soft and musical.

“May the gods favour you, my lord! even as they have favoured me in permitting a sight of your improved health.”

“You have been here often,” began Sergius,

"and I wished to see you and bid you bear my thanks to her who sent you."

Slowly the stole dropped from the eyes — very pretty eyes, that, joined with an equally pretty mouth, took on an expression of hurt astonishment.

"That *sent* me?" she murmured, half sadly. "Ah, well; doubtless it is a matter of insolence for a poor slave girl to wish and ask concerning the health of the noble Sergius."

The tribune watched her closely and with mingled feelings. He had settled in his mind, from the moment of Agathocles' mention of the fact, that the slave woman who called must be sent by Marcia, and it was not without a pang of very poignant regret that he relinquished the idea. That he could not place this girl — one of a class so far beneath the notice of a Roman of rank — was not strange, and yet the face seemed vaguely familiar to him, and — it was certainly little short of beautiful. A man flouted, or, still worse, ignored by a mistress at whose shrine he has worshipped, might well be pardoned a feeling of satisfaction that his well-being was a matter of interest to at least one pretty woman.

Meanwhile the girl stood before him, her arms hanging by her sides, her eyes modestly

cast down, and her whole attitude indicative of detected audacity and submissive despair. Agathocles had transferred his attention from his patient to the visitor, and his scrutiny seemed to trouble her.

"So it was yourself alone who desired to learn of my welfare," said Sergius, with a faint smile. "Believe me, my girl, no Roman is too noble to value the interest of beauty like yours."

There was just the suspicion of a laugh in the downcast eyes, but it sped away as swiftly as it came, and she made haste to answer:—

"Truly, my lord does not measure his own worth. There are many, as much above me in beauty as they are in rank; many who cannot venture to show the concern they doubtless feel. What has a poor slave girl to do with maidenly modesty—the plaything of any master who chooses to smile upon her for a moment?"

She spoke bitterly, and Sergius, half frowning, half smiling, reached out his hand. The contrast between this girl's frankly spoken interest and the courted Marcia's trivial indifference came to him more powerfully. What a fool a man was to waste himself on some haughty mistress who exacted all things and gave nothing! She had taken the hand he

held out, and now, suddenly, he drew her to him, and kissed her.

Then he found new occasion to marvel over the strange ways of women. As if awakened from a dream or a part in a comedy, to some instant and frightful peril, she wrenched herself from him and, wrapping her cloak around her face, turned and ran like a deer through the hallway and out into the street.

Sergius was dazed for a moment by the suddenness of it all; then he rose.

"Quick, Smyrnus!" he called to the boy who attended on the porter. "Follow, and bring me word where she goes."

The delay had been short, and Smyrnus was swift of foot, but when he reached the street it was empty as far as he could see, and a dash to each corner of the house gave no better results. Inquiries, likewise, were unavailing, and he returned slowly and with shoulders that already seemed to tingle under the expected rods.

Meanwhile, Agathocles had essayed to exert his authority over the invalid, and was protesting volubly against the latter's imprudence. Sergius was in excellent humour, despite the escape of his conquest.

"Nonsense, my Agathocles," he began, half guiltily at first, but gaining confidence as he

pursued his justification. "Do you not see, all this has done me more good than a score of days spent in dull reclining, with only nauseous draughts to mark the hours by? I have learned that I am a man again, with an interest in the Republic and myself. Surely such knowledge is worth a little risk. To-morrow, mark you, if the gods favour me, I shall descend into the Forum and see if nothing is to be effected against this rabble in the matter of the elections. Had she not magnificent eyes, my Agathocles? not those of the dull ox, as your Homer puts it, but rather of the startled fawn?"

"They seemed to me more of the fox," said the physician, dryly, "being golden in colour and very cunning. I doubt you fathomed her smile, though wherefore she should seek —"

"Sacrilege! Agathocles," cried Sergius, gayly; "but here comes Smyrnus. Well, boy, where is the lair of this fox of our good Agathocles?"

The terrified boy had thrown himself upon his face.

"I hastened with all speed, master," he protested. "At your word I flew, but she was gone, as if a god had snatched her up, nor was there a passer-by who had seen aught —"

Sergius was frowning ominously; then his face cleared.

"Doubtless that was it, Smyrnus," he said. "Your judicious piety is quicker than your heels in saving your back. If a god took her, he showed excellent taste, and it would be utter sacrilege to punish you for failing to learn her whereabouts. Come, Agathocles, be not so gloomy. Do you think it is Æsculapius who has come to your aid? He, at least, is no spruce, young rival. Be conciliatory, or I may, perhaps, venture to try my fortune even against —"

"I am rather of the opinion that some cunning Hermes has tricked Eros and Æsculapius and my Lord Lucius as well," said the physician. An expression of grim humour lurked in his face, and Sergius felt strangely uncomfortable.

"What is a physician if he talk not in the language of oracles," he said, querulously. "Well, you may send me to my couch now, if you will; but, mark you, to-morrow I go to the Forum."

XI.

POLITICS.

ON the following day, Sergius, true to his purpose, ordered his litter to be brought, and, reclining as his weakness compelled, was borne down into the Forum crowded with its mass of turbulent and perspiring humanity. Nor was the temper of the rabble doubtful. On every side he heard arraignments of Fabius, and, through him, of all men guilty of good birth or riches. Under every portico, speakers were pouring forth harangues whose ignorance was only matched by their coarseness and surpassed by their reckless malevolence. Once he bade his bearers set him down, near where one Quintus Bæbius Herennius, a plebeian tribune and a relative of Varro's, was holding forth to a sympathetic crowd.

"Do you not know, ye foolish Romans," cried the orator, alternately slapping his thigh, waving his arms, and casting up his eyes, "that this Hannibal was brought into Italy by these very nobles, who are always desiring war? Can

you not see how they are protracting the war, when you consider that one man of the people, our own Minucius, when he commanded the four legions, was sufficient for the enemy? Behold how this traitorous, this *noble* Fabian schemed to expose the brave Minucius and two legions of the people to destruction, and only rescued the remnant that he might pose as their saviour and be saluted 'father' and 'patron.' There, indeed, was our Minucius at fault, as what honest, poor man is not, when confronted by the wiles of those bred to craft and trickery! See, too, how the consuls have followed the same dilatory measures, and can you doubt that it is all by agreement with these traitor nobles? Know well, now, that this war will have no ending until a man of the people ends it—a real plebeian; a new man. See you not that both consuls, by tarrying with the army, have set up an interregnum, that the wicked nobles may the better influence your choice? But if you be true Romans, such as were those who camped upon the Sacred Hill, you will remember that one consulship, at least, is yours by law, and you will elect a man to fill it who is one of yourselves and who will spurn the rich, as they now seek to spurn you and me and all good men."

Sergius had listened to this harangue, and to the applause which greeted it, with mingled feelings of indignation and sorrow — sentiments to which was added surprise when he noted through the closed curtains of his litter that several patricians passed by and smiled and nodded to the speaker while he poured forth his diatribes. Now, however, a new commotion seemed to agitate the throng, who, turning suddenly, ran pell-mell in one direction, almost overturning the litter — a catastrophe from which it was only saved by a vigorous use of the bearers' staves upon the heads of the nearest.

Sergius thrust aside the curtains and half raised himself to see the cause of the disturbance. The brightly fullered gown of a candidate flashed before his eyes, and then he recognized Varro standing upon a silversmith's counter, smiling this way and that, grasping the hands of those nearest, kissing his own to the very outskirts of the mob, and all the while crying out, to the promptings of his nomenclator: "Greeting to you, Marcus!" "Health, Quintus!" "Commend me to your brother, my Caius — yes, to be sure — when he shall return from the army. Ah! friends, when I am consul, there will be a hasty returning from

such foolish wars. You shall see the African fork-bearers winding through the Forum."

"And that is the first word of truth I have heard from you, Varro, or from your Herennius here," cried Sergius, who had risen and now stood, pale and gaunt, beside his litter. "With you and such as you to command, we may well look to see the African fork-bearers winding through the Forum — yes, and pillaging amid its ruins."

A roar of vituperation drowned whatever answer the candidate might have made, as, with brandished clubs, cleavers, knives, styli — any weapon that could be snatched up from the booths — the nearest score of the crowd made a dash at the presumptuous noble.

The litter-bearers were sturdy fellows, and their staves were stout, but the contest was far too unequal. One had gone down with a deep gash in the shoulder, and the others were quickly forced back upon their master.

Sergius stood with his back to one of the square pillars of peperino, with folded arms and pale face upon which hovered a smile of ineffable scorn. He recognized his peril: the fate that had befallen many noble Romans in the election riots of the Republic; but his sentiment was rather one of indifference than of

perturbation, and he was about to order his slaves to give up their hopeless defence, in order that the crowd might let them, at least, go without further hurt, when an entirely unexpected diversion brought him relief and safety.

Varro had viewed the attack upon his critic with a pleasure that he scarcely tried to conceal. He kept begging his adherents to be moderate and abstain from violence, but in so low a voice that his counsels could not be heard except by those immediately around him, and were entirely inaudible to the howling assailants to whom they were presumably addressed. Another voice, however, a shrill, female voice, came suddenly to Sergius' ears : —

“Would that my brother could come to life and command another fleet, that the streets might be less crowded!”

Sergius recognized, in a rich litter that was tossed hither and thither by the billows of the mob, the face of the sister of that Publius Claudius who had lost for Rome the naval battle off Drepanum. The mob, too, recognized her, and the scornful speech bit deeply. All around arose a cry of —

“To the ædiles with her! To the ædiles! She has rejoiced in the death of our brothers! May the gods curse the noble!” and, in a

moment, Sergius found himself alone but for his bruised and bleeding servants, while the tide of riot swept up the Forum, bearing the litter upon its tossing crests, and the virago within continued to scream out her defiance and contempt.

Varro remained, surrounded by a few friends, and, as Sergius approached, he drew himself up, as if to reënforce his courage with a sense of his importance. The tribune was about to pass him without a word; but the demagogue, emboldened by this seeming unwillingness for an encounter, placed himself in his path.

"Did you hear the kindly wishes that the great express for the health of their poorer countrymen?" he began, tauntingly.

"It is like your kind, Varro," replied Sergius, speaking slowly and in tones of profound contempt, "to attribute to our party any intemperance of a single opponent; but do you also credit us with the virtues of individuals? I might with better grace attribute the murderous attack just made—and with your connivance—upon myself, to the party of the people. That I do not do so, you may lay to a moderation and magnanimity that are not learned in the tradesman's booth or the butcher's shambles."

Varro flushed crimson, and he looked from side to side, as if to call upon his friends for new violence; but a company of young patriicians were descending from the Comitia, and his fellows were dull of comprehension.

"Do you beware, though, Varro," continued Sergius, "lest, in striving to attain power and place on the wings of calumny against those better than yourself, or by the suggestion of false grievances to those who are ignorant and weak, you may, by these things, incite one riot too many. Beware, above all things, lest you win."

Then, drawing his toga close, as if to avoid a contaminating touch, he strode by to join the approaching band of young men, leaving his opponent vicious to snarl, but powerless to bite.

After the usual greetings and inquiries concerning his health, they walked on together toward the Curtian Pool, and Sergius' thoughts took on a deeper colour from the despondent speech of his friends. That Varro would receive the votes of the centuries, beyond all doubt, was unanimously conceded; and so great was the dissatisfaction with Fabius, that their regret seemed only for the manner of the popular victory and the man who was to gain it. A few

hot-heads dropped hints to the effect that it might become necessary to reorganize the patrician clubs and meet violence with violence, in which event there could be but little doubt as to the result; but the sentiment of the majority was adverse to such measures, and they viewed the possibilities with an indifference that to Sergius seemed even more ominous than the frenzy of the rabble and the worthlessness of its leaders. His attempts to defend the Fabian policy, speaking as one of its victims, were hopelessly thrown away. All Rome was mad for battle, even at the cost of sending the butcher's son to command the legions; and, two days later, the result of low chicanery and indifferent lethargy took shape.

The trumpet had summoned the army of the city to the Field of Mars, and century after century had entered the enclosure to cast its vote for Varro—for Varro alone, until no one of the noble candidates, who received the half-hearted support of their fellows, got even enough pebbles to be proclaimed elected to the second consulship. To Varro alone, cringing and insolent, was the oath administered; for Varro alone was the prayer put up; for Varro was the declaration twice made, according to the laws of the Republic, and into Varro's hands was

placed the presidency over the assembly that was to elect his colleague.

Then followed an exhibition of plebeian cunning. There were among the supporters of the consul those who realized what he himself could not: his military incompetence and the terrible necessity that, at such a juncture, there should be at least one soldier-consul. Varro had won on his merits as self-announced, on the strength of his own arraignment of his adversaries' shortcomings. He stood forth the incarnation of party and class hatred; and now the victors, half dazed by the very completeness of their triumph, paused in mid career to look for a soldier with whom the army might be entrusted. That he must be a noble, was self-evident. Even the rabble, now that its first outburst had passed, was not so mad as to attribute military skill to any of its wordy leaders. The butcher's colleague must be a patrician, but he must be such a patrician as would cast reproach upon his class, while he supplied the one quality requisite to the plebeian situation. To whose political acumen first occurred the name of Lucius Æmilius Paullus, no one seemed to know; but, once suggested, there was none to deny its entire appropriateness. Paullus was a veteran of

several wars, an experienced commander, a brave soldier; and there his merits ended. He had been brought to trial for misappropriation of the plunder taken in the Illyrian campaign, and, as many thought, acquitted by means as scandalous as the crime itself, while his less influential colleague suffered for both. Harsh and rude, no high-born Roman was less popular; and his exaggeration of class insolence bade fair to offer him as an illustration, ready to the tongue of every demagogue, of what the people must always expect from patrician rule.

So, one by one, the five noble opponents of Varro were rejected, and the word went out that, of their enemies, the people would have Paullus and him alone.

XII.

BRAWLINGS.

MORE sick at heart, as he grew stronger in body, Sergius returned from the final voting in the Field of Mars. For some reason the popular party, sated with triumph, had permitted the election, as prætors, of good men who had experience in military affairs; perhaps that these might, together with Paullus, make surer the victory that was to redound to the honour of the darling of the mob and proclaim to all the Roman world the superiority of the butcher, Varro, over Fabius, the well-fathered.

As Sergius was borne along toward the Palatine district, he found the streets crowded with a populace he had hardly known to exist in the city. Down from the lofty tenements of the Aicus, up from the slums of the Suburra, the Gate of the Three Folds, and the Etruscan Street they poured, drunk with joy and with hatred of all men who wore white togas and had money to lend or lands to till. At each corner a denser throng was gathered around

jugglers, tumblers, wrestlers that writhed over the road-way, actors who danced Etruscan pantomimes and carried their make-up in little bags slung around their necks, singers of medleys, and would-be popular poets who spouted coarse epigrams and ribald satires levelled at the thieving, the effeminate, the adulterous patri- cians who thought to rule Rome and had named an Æmilius Paullus to stand beside and check the generous, the fearless, the incorruptible Varro. Threatening looks and words were cast at Sergius and the company of freedmen and clients that surrounded him, until he was not ill-pleased to see the escort of another noble issue from a side street and beat its way to where the exhausted bearers had set down the tribune's litter, pausing to gain breath before attempting to push on farther. When, however, he recognized in the sturdy old man who strode along in the midst of the new company, no more distant acquaintance than the father of Marcia, he was conscious of a strong revulsion. Better the continued buffeting with an obstreperous mob than the embarrassments he foresaw in such a rencontre; but it was too late to avoid it: the interests and perils of the two parties were too nearly identical, and he heard the gruff voice of his old friend crying out: —

"Back, exercisers of the whip! Back, colonizers of chains! To the cross with you all! Is this Animula or Rome, where rude clowns do not recognize their betters?" Then, for the first time, perceiving Sergius: "Greeting to you, my Lucius! May the gods favour you better than they have the Republic this day."

At that moment, a big, hulking fellow thrust himself forward in the path of the advancing patrician and hiccoughed out:—

"May you meet with a plague, master! Truly there are to be no betters or worsers in Rome—now that the noble Varro is consul and —"

The staff of Torquatus felled him to the ground, where he lay shuddering and drawing up his legs, while a yell of rage and menace broke from the crowd. Scarcely changing a line in his grim face, the old man calmly trussed the folds of his toga about his left arm, freed his right more fully, and drew a stylus of such size as to suggest a dagger much more than an instrument for writing: such a weapon as was born of the election brawls of earlier days, innocent under the law, yet equally efficient as pen or sword.

Daunted at his aspect, the foremost assailants held back.

"Are there not more vinegar drinkers that wish to learn from an old Roman the manners of old Rome?" asked Torquatus, sneeringly.

How the fight, once begun, would have ended seemed hardly uncertain, for the crowd filled all the neighbouring streets: half were drunk, and nearly half were provided with arms of some sort, many of them such as were warranted by no pretext of law, save the knowledge that Varro was consul, and the belief that he would protect his adherents in whatever breach might please them. The dangerous front of Torquatus and his company might have sufficed to check those who would have to lead a rush, but they, unfortunately, had the least to say on the subject of giving battle. Already the mobs, pouring in from the side streets at the first scent of a brawl, were pushing the forlorn hope, all unwilling, to its fate; three or four had already gone down with broken heads, and a freedman of Torquatus had been stabbed in the side, when, above the tumult, rose a voice crying:—

"Make way for the Consul, Paullus! Way! way!"

The matter, truly, was becoming serious, thought the outskirts of the mob—all of them who could hear the shout. A brush

with the fiercest, the most hated, the most hating aristocrat that had been borne behind the fasces for many a year, would mean punishment with a heavy hand. The pressure was at once relieved, and though those in front saw no sign of consul or lictor — saw only Sergius who had descended from his litter and was leading his company in a vigorous attack — yet they were, for the most part, only too glad to escape from the glaring eyes of Titus Manlius and the broad sweep of his weapon. The old man was puffing hard from the unwonted exertion when Sergius reached his side through the fast-scattering assailants.

"The gods have punished my blasphemy with kindness," began Torquatus, "in sending my Lord Paullus in such timely fashion."

"Say, rather, my father, in sending his name into the mind of one Lucius Sergius," said Sergius, laughing.

For a moment the other frowned with a puzzled look; then his face cleared, with as close an approach to a smile as it could wear.

"And our rescue is not due to the consul, then?" he asked, still slow to fully grasp the ruse.

"To the consul's name and to the favouring cunning of Mercury," said Sergius, bowing.

"Truly, you should command," exclaimed Torquatus. "A general so ready in craft as you are might hope to match the African—and, by the gods! no one else seems able to. Come, let us go on to my house."

Though harshly said, and in tones that one less acquainted with the speaker might well have mistaken for sarcasm, Sergius knew that the compliment was genuine. The aged patrician had turned and strode away, as he finished speaking, and etiquette left to the younger man no choice but to pay to the elder the reverence of his escort. That he had asked what he might well have looked for as a matter of course, was something of a condescension, according to the strict ceremoniousness of the ancient usage; therefore Sergius hurried on and overtook him, offering his litter, at which the other sniffed contemptuously.

"May the gods grant me to lie at rest by the Appian Way, before I require such feet!" Then, as his sharp eyes noted the flush upon Sergius' face, he added: "Fever, wounds, and death may pardon effeminacy; and, truly, I would beg you to accompany me as you came, were it not that a climb up the Palatine should bring new health to one who could run ten miles with a broken shoulder.

Believe me, my friend, the dictator thought better of you than he spoke, and would have regretted the axe. Jupiter grant that it be yours to justify his opinion!"

No stimulant could have given such strength to the convalescent as did these words, and from such a source. The dictator had not condemned, then; he had even spoken well of him. The knowledge of it put to flight the embarrassment he had felt when he realized that he was going perforce to Marcia's house — perhaps into her presence; and he found himself standing straighter and stepping out with longer and bolder strides.

"Good words are better than bad ones for a good man," mused Torquatus, wagging his head sententiously, and darting at his companion a comprehensive glance, behind which lurked a grim smile. "If women could ever learn as much, they might govern us the more readily — which the gods forefend! as I doubt not they will."

Then the company halted. It was many months since Sergius had stood before that door, and he could not, without grave discourtesy, refuse the invitation to enter. Well, what mattered it? Marcia cared nothing; why should he? Then, too, the stimulus of the

dictator's approval was still upon him, as the warning cry of the porter bade those nearest stand back while the door swung out. Most of the party took their leave here, but several followed into the atrium for adieus more appropriate to their station.

At last all had departed save Sergius, who, having given orders that his attendants should await him in the street, passed on into the peristyle with his host.

There, beside the fountain, spinning, as he had so often seen her—as he had seen her through all the days and nights of the campaign—sat the lady Marcia. Two of her maidens were assisting: one who glanced up at Sergius and smiled tauntingly; and another who turned her face away, and seemed to be trying to hide it in the close inspection of a great bunch of fleece. But both the forwardness of the one and the bashfulness of the other were wasted upon the visitor. As a matter of fact, he was so lost in wonder at his courage and self-control as to be well past observing the idiosyncrasies of slaves; and, if his own attitude was acceptable, even to himself, his admiration for that of his hostess amounted to absolute bitterness. That she, a mere girl, should rise and come forward

with so conventional yet friendly a greeting, that neither her lip should tremble nor her cheek flush, was little short of intolerable. Nevertheless it helped to brace his own resolves yet more firmly. Such poise, after all that had been between them, could have its source only in the most absolute indifference.

"Health to the noble Lucius! Let him believe that there is no one of his friends who thanks the gods more fervently for his recovery."

On its face the speech was cordial — much too cordial for love that has quarrelled; therefore he bent his head and answered: —

"Were it not impiety, the noble Lucius would thank his well-wisher for her words, more, even, than he thanks the gods for his recovery."

"Ah!" she replied lightly, "then he must scatter his thanks yet more broadly, for there cannot be a defenceless woman in Rome who does not rejoice that so brave a defender is spared to the State."

Sarcasm for sarcasm, he thought bitterly, but he answered as carelessly: —

"In that case, I shall not bear my thanks beyond the gods; for if my health be no greater care to you than to all the white stoles in the city, I think I can measure its value."

An expression of almost infantile surprise and reproach crossed her features.

"You are either very forgetful or very ungrateful," she said. "If Venus has healed so faithful a votary, surely mortal women have not been lacking in their sympathy; nor, if report tells truly, has the noble Lucius been lacking in gratitude — until now."

That shaft struck home, and, for a moment, Sergius could find no answer. He could only remember the episode of the girl who had come to him, and wonder which one of his household could have borne treacherous word to Marcia of his weakness and his discomfiture. Meanwhile she had turned carelessly and dismissed her women, and one had gone, throwing back laughing glances, the other, with her face still buried in the wool with which she had filled her arms.

Torquatus had been standing near, somewhat puzzled by what he felt to be a battle of words between his daughter and his guest, but a battle whose plans of attack or defence he found himself at a loss to fathom. Feeling at last that it was incumbent upon him as host to break in upon badinage that bade fair to become embarrassing, he spoke briefly of his encounter with the mob and of Lucius' timely aid and clever ruse. Marcia listened closely, nodding her head from

time to time, but her colour had deepened and her hand was clenched tight when the story was finished.

"Who will be safe in Rome, father!" she burst out. "The rabble elect their magistrates, and the magistrates, in return, let them do as they please. When it comes to attacking *you*; a consular—a Manlius! We must sleep no more in our houses unless the household be in arms and on guard."

Sergius gazed in astonishment. A Marcia spoke whom he had never known; but the old man smiled grimly.

"It is the blood," he said. "She is truly 'Manlia,' though called, against custom, for my dead Marcius. When Claudians change the toga for the paludamentum, and Ogulnians cease to babble of Greek philosophy, then shall a Manlian be lacking in the spirit of our order—ay, and in the courage to act."

Marcia did not seem to hear his words. Her brows were drawn together in what Sergius considered a very pretty frown. She turned toward him.

"They have gotten their butcher for consul," she went on; "now let him lead them. How long before they will be begging for the swords they have despised! Let them alone! Let

Hannibal work his will; then *we* shall stand forth, like the exiled Camillus, to defend a Rome purged of its black blood — a Rome worth defending — ”

But Sergius had recovered from his surprise, and his face was serious, as he interrupted the torrent of words.

“Patrician and plebeian must stand or fall together, my Marcia,” he said quietly. “It is the Republic that we shall defend, and defend the more bravely because it is, in a way, defenceless. If a time of madness come upon a parent, do we not guard her the more tenderly who cannot guard herself? — ay, and even against the foolish acts she may herself attempt? ”

“And you — you — a Sergius, will serve under this Varro? ” she exclaimed.

“Truly,” he said bowing, “I am a Roman, and the barbarians are in Italy. When they are gone, I will fight Varro on the rostra, in the Senate. Perhaps I shall even lead my clients to drag him, stabbed, from his house.”

She was gazing at him with great, round eyes in which the contempt and anger began to give place to a softer look — a look which no man might hope quite to interpret; then she threw her head to one side and laughed, but the laugh was short and nervous.

"I congratulate your eloquence and patriotism, as I sympathize with your unpropitious gallantry. May Venus make happy your next pursuit of a pretty slave."

Again she laughed, and this time her laugh was unfeignedly malicious. Sergius flushed crimson; Torquatus looked scandalized and stern; but before either could answer, she was gone.

"You will return to the army, then?" said the old man, hurriedly and as if to cover his annoyance. "How soon will your strength be sufficient?"

"I shall set out to-night," said Sergius. The flush had gone from his face, and he was very pale, while his voice sounded as if from far away. "By so doing I shall journey by easier stages, and shall avoid accompanying the consul; nor will he reach the camp before me."

"There is talk of new levies," said Torquatus, vaguely.

"Yes, and there will be fighting soon."

"Flaminius fought."

"May Jupiter avert the omen! and you will forgive me, my father, if I bid you a too hasty farewell? I had not determined to go so soon—but it is best. And there is preparation to be made."

Torquatus followed him silently to the door, and watched the light of his torches till it died out below the hill; then he shook his head with a puzzled, sad expression.

"Yes, truly," he said; "let the omen be lacking."

XIII.

THE RED FLAG.

THE red flag fluttered in the breeze above the tent of Varro.

Months had come and gone since the plebeians had triumphed in the Field of Mars; months of weary lying in camp, months of anxious watching, months of marches and countermarches. Contrary to the expectations of Sergius, neither of the new consuls had gone straight to the legions, and the pro-consuls, Servilius and Regulus, remained in command. Paullus had busied himself in preparing for the coming spring, levying new men and new legions, and directing from the city a policy not unlike that of Fabius; while Varro, on the other hand, as if maddened by his sudden elevation, rushed from Senate House to Forum and from Forum to every corner where a mob could congregate; everywhere rolling his eyes and waving his hands, now shrieking frantic denunciations against the selfish, the criminal, the traitorous nobles who had brought the war

to Italy and sustained it there by their wicked machinations and contemptible cowardice; now congratulating his hearers that the people had at last taken the conspirators by the throat and had elected a fearless consul, an incorruptible consul, an able consul, one who would soon show the world that there were men outside of the three tribes. Then he would fall to mapping out his campaign — a different plan for each cluster of gaping listeners, but each ending in such a slaughter of invaders as Italy had never seen, and a picture of the long triumph winding up the Sacred Way, of Hannibal disappearing forever within the yawning jaws of the Tullianum. At times, when his imagination ran riot most, he went so far as to depict with what luxuriance the corn would grow on the farm of that happy man whose land should be selected by the great consul, the plebeian consul, the consul Varro, for his slaughter of the enemies of the Roman people.

To these harangues Paullus and the nobles listened in wonder and disgust — even in terror; and when, at length, the consuls set out to take command of the greatest army Rome had ever put into the field, the story was passed from mouth to mouth of how Fabius had spoken with Paullus and warned him that he must

now do battle against two commanders: Hannibal and his own colleague; and of how Paulus had answered in words that told more of foreboding than of hope.

Even the Senate seemed to have fallen under the coarse spell of this mouthing ranter. News had come that Hannibal was at Cannæ, had seized upon the Roman stores in the citadel there; that, strongly posted, he was scouring the country in all directions; that the allies could not be expected to stand another season of ravage; and so, when the consuls set out to take command of the legions, it was with the express direction of the fathers to give battle on the first favourable opportunity.

Still, there was room left them for some discretion, and when Paullus had viewed the country along the banks of the Aufidus, level as it lay and open to the sweep of cavalry, his soldier eye told him that the opportunity was not here, and that, with a short delay, the enemy must, in the lack of safe forage, retire to more favourable ground.

Then followed quarrels and denunciations and furious mouthings; but Varro did not neglect to use one day of his command to lead the army forward to a point between the Carthaginians and the sea, whence it would be impossible

for Paullus to hope to withdraw them safely in the face of the foe.

It was on the first of Sextilis that Hannibal offered battle; but this was Paullus' day, and he had lain quiet in camp, "Sulking," as his colleague exultantly put it, "because a plebeian's generalship had kept another do-nothing patrician commander from running away." Then the next morning broke — Varro's day — and the red flag fluttered from the spear above Varro's tent.

A group of men were gathered before the quarters occupied by certain of the special cavalry: mounted volunteers, for the most part of rank, who served out of respect to the consul, Paullus. Fully armed, with horses held near by, they were already prepared to ride out at the word, and they listened to the din of preparation going on on every side, and watched the crimson signal of battle that now flapped lazily in the wind and again hung limp against its staff.

"The butcher has his way at last," remarked a youth who had scarce offered up his first beard; but the man he addressed, Marcus Decius, growled in reply: —

"Wait, only wait, my little master, and we shall see who is the butcher and who is the fat steer."

"But," put in another of the company, "have you not heard that our camp beyond the stream had no water yesterday? that the Numidians cut them off from it? Doubtless we are to cross over to its relief."

Decius rose from his buckler, upon which he had been resting, and swept his arm out across the country.

"All one," he said; "water or blood; this bank or that! Look! No room for our infantry to spread out; level ground for their horse to sweep clean. You have never been close to the Numidians, my master?" and he pointed to the scar across his forehead. "They ride fast and strike hard — when the country pleases them."

The boy laughed carelessly, but said nothing, while he who had spoken third hesitated a moment and frowned. Then he said in a lower voice: —

"You are an old soldier, Marcus, — a head decurion once, — and you would do better than try to terrify men of less experience."

Decius ground his teeth, and his eyes flashed, but he lowered his voice when he replied: —

"I thank you, Caius Manlius, for the reminder; and I also may recall to you that I am neither the only nor the highest officer

who is serving as volunteer to-day, because Varro must have legions commanded by butchers and bakers and money-lenders. I, too, am a plebeian, and I cast my pebble for my order (whereat the infernal gods are doubtless now rejoicing); but I am also, as you say, an old soldier, and hold the camp to be no place for the tricks of the Forum. As for frightening recruits, if words and the sight of old scars will frighten them, they had best ride north to-day hard and fast."

Manlius' face flushed at the reminder of his own lost command, and, as if by consent, both men glanced over at another who stood near them, leaning on his spear. Drawn by the centred attention of the two, Lucius Sergius turned from his inspection of the rising mists, beyond which lay the Carthaginian forces, and looked silently and sadly at his friends: Manlius, the brother of his mistress, parted from him for a while by petty embarrassments and diverse duties, but, for the last days, closer than ever in kindred service and fellowship; and Decius, the sturdy comrade of the Campanian raid, the man who talked, now like Ulysses, now like Thersites, but who always fought like Diomed; the very Nisus who had saved his life. It seemed, too, as if the others

understood the import of his glance, for Decius turned away ostentatiously, and sought to arrange the leathern straps of his corselet skirt, while Manlius strode over and grasped Sergius' hand.

"The butcher showed us better favour than he intended, when he put others in our commands," he said gayly. "We shall fight side by side, and perhaps my sister may be pleased to play the siren no longer. Besides, I am well satisfied to be free from any of the responsibilities of this day."

"Marcia is no songstress of the rock, my Caius," said Sergius, half sadly, half playfully; "unless her heart be the rock from which she sings—a rock to me; but the gods have given men other things, when women do not choose to love:—things that will serve to stir us to-day. Afterward we shall be still." Then, noting that the young man who had first addressed Decius was now watching their talk with troubled face, he raised his voice cheerfully. "Tribune or volunteer, it is all one to me. Do we not serve under Æmilius Paullus and his Illyrian auspices? After this day, friends, we shall see no more pulse-eaters in Italy."

Suddenly, a blast of trumpets rang clear, above the noise of preparation; lieutenants

dashed hither and thither, their legs bent along their horses' sides; several cohorts marched past, to man the rampart nearest the foe, while from behind came the louder rattle of arms, and the earth shook under the tread of the legions, pressing on through the porta dextra, and spreading out in three great columns that plunged down the slope into the Aufidus, and rose again, and pushed out into the plain on its southern bank. Hastati, principes, triarii—they marched in order of battle, ready to face about at the moment of attack, while, as they deployed, the famished Romans across the river swarmed down, under shelter of the protecting lines, and, lying thick in the turbid water below, drank as if their parched tongues and lips would never soften.

The morning mists were clearing. Strange sounds and rumblings came also from the south and west, and the red flag hung limp upon the spear.

Still the legions streamed on, but no orders had come to the special volunteers, and Sergius began to wonder whether they were to be left to guard the camp, as an added indignity to their rank. He ascended the rampart, with Manlius and Decius, and strove to pierce the distance in the west. Now and then a broad

flash of light seemed to shine before his eyes, and ever there came to his ears the rumble of tramping thousands; the dust, too, was thickening, to take the place of the scattered mists, and the wind blew it up in blinding clouds into the face of Rome's battle.

"Gods! what is Terrentius Varro doing!" cried Decius suddenly, and the three turned at his voice. A nodding forest of crests, red and black, rising a cubit above the uncovered helmets of the legionaries, seemed to fill the eastern plain and extend almost to where the Adriatic beat upon the shingle. "Look at his front! Look at how closely the maniples are crushed together! Gods! they are almost 'within the rails' already."

Sergius looked, and the frown upon his brow deepened.

"Eighty thousand men," he muttered; "and we shall scarce outflank their forty thousand. Does Varro wish to cast aside every advantage! Gods! what gain is there in such depth? and he might —"

"Evidently you do not understand the strategy of great commanders who have studied war."

The voice that interrupted was cynical and scornful, to a degree that men hated the speaker

even before they saw him; and, when the three wheeled quickly, his face gave nothing to dispel the bad impression. A tall, gaunt man, in plain and somewhat battered armour; a face sharp-featured, very dark, and deeply lined wherever the wrinkles lay that expressed pride and contempt and violent passions; lowering brows from beneath which shone little beady, cunning eyes that opponents feared and distrusted: this was Lucius Æmilius Paullus, the conqueror of Illyria, the man who had barely escaped conviction for his peculations, the colleague of Varro the butcher, a patrician of the bluest blood in Rome, a knave in pecuniary matters, selfish and ungoverned, but a brave and wary soldier from cothurni to crest.

"You seem to be criticising a Roman consul: even my brother, Varro;" he said again, for the three had only bowed in reply to his former speech. "Are you not presumptuous? — you, Lucius Sergius, and you, Caius Manlius — boys in war — and you, Decius, or whoever you may be — a man of Varro's order, if I mistake not?"

"Yes, my father, I criticise," replied Sergius, at last, for the others said nothing.

"Perhaps you were thinking that he has extended his front too far?" said the consul, and there was infinite sarcasm in his tones.

Sergius grew crimson under the taunting voice and the little, shifty eyes.

"I have ventured to say," he replied haughtily, "that the consul, Varro, is not using our numbers as he might. As you have noted, the front *is* contracted, where we might easily lash around their flank like the thongs of a scourge. Nevertheless had I known that the noble colleague of the general was near me, I would have restrained my words."

"Ah! then you have doubtless grown more respectful of commanders since you disobeyed your dictator in Campania;" but now the anger in Sergius' face told the speaker that the limit of endurance had been reached, and his tone became less offensive. "That is in the old days, though, and you *did* run twelve miles with a broken shoulder: you see I know all — only I am sure that you are not realizing how deeply your general has studied the Punic wars, or perhaps you do not know how necessary is depth to the battle that would stand against the great war-beasts. It is possible, barely possible, that our most scientific commander has forgotten that the enemy has no elephants here; but what is that to a great genius? He has learned that Carthage wars with elephants, that these are best met by deep-

ening the files, and that we are about to fight Carthage; therefore he deepens the files, though the last elephant in Italy died two years ago in the northern marshes. If you are beaten, you will at least have the satisfaction of being beaten while fighting most learnedly."

As Sergius noted the bitterness and agony in the voice that spoke, he found his resentment giving place to pity for the hard, grim man who, powerless to avert, yet saw clearly every cord of the snare into which he was being driven.

"Do we guard the camp, my father?" he asked, gently, when Paullus had finished.

The latter started from the gloomy stare with which he was regarding the fast-forming lines.

"I have been offered the command of the camp," he said, almost fiercely. "I have refused it. Escape to the north would be too easy — and I do not wish to escape. What do you think the centuries would do if I came home beaten? I who escaped so narrowly before?" He leered cunningly at his listeners; then his face grew set, and his voice cold and even. "I have solicited command of the Roman cavalry. We shall fight on the right wing, beside the river, and I do not think many of us will ride

from the battle. Varro commands the cavalry of the allies on the left, and the pro-consuls" — he hesitated a moment — "the pro-consuls market their beeves in the centre. You will cross with me now. My volunteers ride about my body. It is time. It is time."

The breeze from the southward freshened every minute, and the red flag lashed out angrily toward the sea.

XIV.

CANNÆ.

THE cavalry trumpets rang out their clear notes, and Sergius and his companions threw themselves upon their kneeling chargers. Then they rode out and down the bank, behind the consul who, with head hanging upon his breast, had turned his rein the moment he had given the word. What if the dust did swirl up in blinding sheets from the south? Before them lay the Roman battle, horse and foot — such an army as the city had never sent forth. What if its masses were somewhat cramped? its front narrow? its general an amateur? They were to fight at last, and how should a mongrel horde of barbarians, but half their number, stand firm against the impetus of such a shock. A moment's hush; then measured voices rose in calm cadence — the voices of the tribunes administering the military oath to each cohort, "Faithful to the senate, obedient to your imperator." What Roman could doubt that the voice of victory spoke in the thunderous response!

And now the clangour of cymbals and the roll of drums came up on the breezes from the south, and, with them, a strange uproar of barbarous shouts and cries. Then it was that the Roman legionaries began to crash their heavy javelins against their great, oblong shields until the din drowned everything else, and the thunder of Jove himself might have roared in vain.

Sergius had ridden up the bank, almost at the consul's rein, and his eyes wandered eagerly over Varro's array. Eight full legions with their quota of allies seemed welded into one huge column: Romans on the right, Italians on the left. The sun was well up, and its rays played upon a very sea of bronze from which the feathered crests rose and shivered like foam. Far beyond the column, on the extreme left, he could make out squadrons of allied horse, and then he turned to take his place amid the cavalry of the city: young men well born, burning with courage and ardour and wrath. Despite himself his heart rose with a leap of triumph. A moment later he caught the little, beady eyes of the consul looking through him, as it were, while the thin mouth beneath writhed itself into a sneer.

"You hope? That is well," said Paullus. "Young men fight better and die better when

they hope ; but I will show you how a Roman soldier can give up his life for naught. I would wish," he added with lowered voice and speaking as if in self-communion, "that more of our horsemen had adopted the Greek arms. Reed spears and ox-hide bucklers will not stand long against heavy cavalry. A temple to Mars the avenger, if I had but a front of Illyrian horse ! See now ! There are the scum !"

His voice rose eagerly at the last words, and Sergius turned from the dark face now flashing with a sudden animation, and looked southward over the plain. For a moment the dust was too thick ; then it seemed to clear away, and the Carthaginian army burst into view.

Undulating like the open sea and rolling steadily on like the long, slow sweep of billows upon a level shore, the glory of barbaric war drew near. On their left, resting upon the river's bank, rode the Spanish and Gallic cavalry, strengthened here and there by a horse and man in full armour like those of the Clinabarians ; and the face of Paullus clouded again when he noted what opponents he must meet : men, horses, arms — all heavier than his own with the exception of a few *turmæ* newly equipped in the Greek fashion. Beyond them, thrown back in echelon, marched Africans in little

squares of sixteen front. These had substituted for their own equipment the Roman spoils of Trasimenus and Trebia. Then, and again somewhat in advance, came alternate companies of Gauls and Spaniards spread out in long thin array; the former stripped to the navel, their hair tied up in a tufted knot, and bearing their great swords upon their shoulders; the Spaniards glittering in their purple-bordered tunics of snowy linen. The waving pikes of phalanges told of more Africans who seemed to lie in echelon beyond, while far away, toward the low hills overgrown with copsewood that formed the eastern horizon, clouds of swift-moving dust, amid which shadows darted hither and thither at seeming random, marked the presence of the wild riders of Numidia who were to face the horsemen of Italy and of the Latin name. In front of all, the plain was dotted with naked men advancing at regular intervals and bearing small bucklers of lynx-hide — the famous Balearic slingers that always opened the day of battle for Carthage. The heart of Sergius swelled within him, beating hard and fast under the tension of the moment. Only a few minutes more, and those magnificent armies would crash together, not to part until the plain should be heaped with corpses that were now men;

until the gods should adjudge the sovereignty of Italy. Then he grew calm, calm as the consul himself, and gazed enraptured upon the picture, as if it meant no more than art and show — only the wind came fresher from the south, and the fine dust, ground up by marching thousands, smarted and blinded his eyes.

Nearer and nearer they drew, with steady, slow advance, while Rome stood still and awaited their coming. And now a commotion seemed to start from the far distant south: the roar of voices, the blinding flash of the sun on tossing swords, a cloud of dust distinct upon the plain, a clump of horse-head standards rising amid it, and a group of riders urging their galloping steeds along the invaders' front. Rich armour of strange pattern shone among them, and, a length ahead of the rest, Sergius could see a white stallion with close-cropped mane, and hoofs and fetlocks stained vermillion, that danced and curvetted and arched its proud neck under the touch of a master. He was not an over-tall man, but his figure as he rode seemed well knit and graceful. His armour was of brown-bronze scale-work, rich with gold and jewels, while a white mantle fringed with Tyrian purple hung from his shoulders; a helmet of burnished gold, horned and crested, gleamed

like a star upon his head, while, even at the distance, even through the swirl of dust, Sergius saw the crisp curled, black beard, and dreamed that he caught the flash of dark, deep-set eyes. There was no need of the beating of weapons against shields, no need of the roar and howls and shrill screaming in a score of tongues to tell the stranger's name. Most of the soldiers kept ranks, but here and there a Gaul would bound forward, dancing with strange leaps and whirling his sword about his head, to throw himself prone before and beneath the vermilion hoofs that never paused or swerved in their gallop. Not a movement, not a glance of the rider gave sign of acknowledgment or recognition; not a look was cast upon the grovelling form, safe or hurt or maimed — only the soldier's comrades howled their plaudits, mingled with laughter and rude jeers whenever the devotee lay still or writhed or rose staggering from some stroke of the vermilion hoofs.

But when the horseman drew bridle before the extreme left of the centre, and, with eyes shaded by his hand, gazed long and earnestly at the Roman array, the plaudits that had greeted his passage died away into low murmurs and then silence. "The general is studying the enemy. Be silent! Who knows but

he would commune with Baal and Moloch? Be silent!" So the word ran around and through the African squares.

Suddenly peals of laughter broke from the group of Carthaginian officers that had ridden behind and who now clustered around him. The calm that no devotion, no suffering, no danger of men could move, was gone; the schalischim had turned from his measuring of the enemy to smile and jest with his friends. Thereupon they threw back their heads and laughed loud and long; and then the Africans noted it, and hoarse cries of joy broke from their ranks. "The schalischim must be sure of victory. Praise be to Melkarth!" Sergius saw a captain of one of the squares run out and touch his forehead to the earth before his commander; but no Roman heard the man's words pregnant with fate.

"Now, my father, let The Lion's Brood lead the beasts of all the fields to their feast. We hunger, father, we hunger!"

And Hannibal had made answer, pointing northward toward the plume-crested sea of blazing bronze, "Lo! friend; there are your meat and wine."

Then a new roar of acclamation broke upward and rolled away to the east. Two richly

armed riders parted from the group and dashed off: Maharbal, light and slender, bending far over his horse's neck, rode headlong in Numidian fashion to his Numidians; Hasdrubal, erect and dignified, galloped to head the Gaulish and Spanish horse upon the banks of Aufidus; trumpets, drums, cymbals, crashed out in mad, barbaric discords; and, with their horse-head standards tossing amid the forest of spears, the Carthaginian line drove forward to the attack.

Running fast before the line of battle, Sergius could still make out, even through the dust, those same naked men with lynx-hide bucklers, dotting the plain at regular intervals, and each man's right arm seemed always whirling about his head. The Roman light troops had pushed on to skirmish, and now they began to fall back, though no arrow or javelin could have reached them—could have flown to the foe. Sergius watched in surprise their confusion and terror as they sought to plunge among the legionaries or hide themselves behind the horsemen; nor had they fled unscathed. Here a man ran by screaming and clasping his shattered hand to his breast; then another staggered up, with arm hanging broken at his side, while the big drops of blood fell slowly from his fingers; and yet

a third appeared, pale and helpless, supported between two companions.

Sounds, too, now dull and heavy, and again ringing and metallic, seemed to punctuate the roar of the advancing host. Sergius saw a horseman near him clap his hand to his forehead and plunge headlong to the earth: horses reared and snorted, some fell with ugly, red blotches on their breasts and throats; the clangour and the thuds came faster—faster; for now the clay and leaden bullets of the slingers fell in showers, like hailstones, and it was good armour that turned them.

Manlius had leaped down to aid a friend who was reeling helplessly, with both eyes beaten out, and, a moment later, he approached Sergius, holding up a slinger's bullet. The red had sunken into the lines of the stamped inscription, and displayed them in hideous relief, "This to your back, sheep!"

"That is always the way with barbarians," sneered Marcus Decius. "No blow without an insult—look! They shall have blows themselves, soon, that will need no insults to piece them out."

Paullus had watched with eagerness, with anxiety, for the signal to advance. Varro seemed to hesitate, while the great masses of

Rome, lashed by the bitter rain of the slings, writhed and groaned in anguish and rage; the light troops had disappeared, and the Balearians, now close at hand, leaped and slung without let or hindrance. Then it was that Paullus, waiting no longer, made a sign to his trumpeters. "Scatter me that rabble!" he cried, and the cavalry clarions raised their voices in one long, swelling peal of sound.

"Close! close!" rose the shout of battle, and the Roman horse dashed forward into the dust cloud—forward upon the slingers that suddenly were not there, had vanished, as it were, into the earth itself.

The straight trumpets and curved horns of the legions were ringing behind them, stirred to life at last, but the horsemen did not hear. What were those looming up ahead? Not naked slingers—armoured cavalry! Hasdrubal with his Gauls and Spaniards were before them—upon them; and all sense and volition were lost in the terrific shock.

Line after line went down, as if at touch, while fresh lines poured on over the heaving mass of men and horses, until those who were face to face seemed to fight upon a hill. Fiercer grew the pressure, tighter and more dense the throng; horses, crushed together, powerless to

move, snorted and tossed their heads in terror, while the riders leaned forward and grappled with those opposite. Weapons first, then hands clutching at throats were doing the deadly work, and the dead, man and horse, stood fast amid the press, unable even to fall and become merged into the hideous, purple thing beneath their feet.

Mere weight, though, was beginning to tell. The human ridge that had marked the joining of battle seemed far back among the enemy, and squadron after squadron, in close array, breasted its top and plunged down to mingle with the living or take their places among the dead. The Romans were giving ground, slowly, stubbornly, but unmistakably, and still, above the shouts and shrieks, the trampling and the clash of weapons, the groans and the hard, short breathing, they could hear the harsh voice of the consul, Paullus, urging his men to make battle firmly.

Backward, steadily backward; and now, in one of those mad rushes, in which men who seemed immovably wedged were swirled about like the water in a maelstrom, Sergius found himself close to the consul, with Manlius but a few paces in front. The thin, cruel lips had writhed away from the white teeth, the helmet was gone, and

the scant, black hair was dabbled with blood that flowed from a slight cut upon the general's brow; the snake-like eyes sought those of the young patrician with a look wherein exultation and despair were strangely mingled.

"To the earth! to the earth, all!" he cried, at the same moment plunging his sword into his horse's throat, and lighting firmly on his feet, as the animal sank suddenly down. "We *must* stand. Gods! where are the legions? Clashing shields and waving javelins, while we are cut to pieces! Gods! they shall pay for it!" Then he drew close to Sergius' ear and whispered as calmly as if in the prætorium: "Learn, now, a lesson of war, my son. Hannibal destroys us piecemeal, choosing where he is strong and we are weak, while Varro allows *his* strength to stand and rest and wait for its turn to come. Down! down all!"

Outnumbered, outarmed, borne down and back, the Roman cavalry still fought, but the press had grown looser, the mass less dense; and now, at the word of the consul, all that could hear his voice obeyed the order of despair, ancient as the day of Lake Regillus. Man after man sprang to earth. Here was freer swing for weapons, here was surer foothold, better chance to stand fast, and, for a moment,

the thronging foe seemed to recoil before the determined onslaught.

But it was not recoil. It was only the devouring of the foremost by that red monster underneath. Who could recoil, with the squadrons still pouring on, over the hill of corpses behind? Beaten, a man could but die in his place, and that much they did. Many, too, had followed the Roman example, leaping from their steeds and fighting hand to hand, till the cavalry battle had changed into a thousand combats of man against man.

It was here that Caius Manlius fell. Sergius was but a few feet from him when he saw the youth sway gently, and, bowing his head, sink down. He had made an effort to push to his side, and then the front of the enemy seemed to receive some new impetus and surged forward over the spot. What mattered it? He had seen the red spear point peeping out between his friend's shoulders. He was dead, as they would all soon be, and the couch was purple and kinglike. At that moment, he felt his arm gripped hard, and turned to look into the consul's face.

"Do you not see it is over?" said Paullus, sharply.

"How?"

"We are falling back — *forced* back — faster and faster. We are where we first stood. Do you see that sapling by the river? I marked it before we rode out. Soon we shall break; come!"

"Where?" asked Sergius.

"Where there may yet be hope, if the gods will it, — if they strike down Varro: the centre, the legions. I do not believe they have fairly advanced their standards yet."

"Do we fly?" and, as he spoke, Sergius frowned darkly.

"Fool! We *fight*. Later, perhaps, we shall die, but not here. In the *centre* —"

As he spoke, a new, swirling rush seemed to carry them away, still together, first with furious violence, then more slowly.

"Ah! it has come," said the consul, quietly. "This way. The dust is blinding, but I think the sun is behind us." Pushing on and striking right and left as he went, Æmilius Paullus fought a pathway through flying and pursuing men. Sergius followed and once, when he saw the consul cut down the boy who had stood near and talked to them that morning, he stopped still and shuddered.

Paullus paused and laughed at him over his shoulder.

"A flying man in the path of a general is much worse than a dead one," he said. "Besides, none of them can save his life in that direction — so it is nothing."

At that moment, indeed, the prophecy that no man of the Roman cavalry would escape, seemed fair for fulfilment. Few fought on, and these were soon ridden down, while Gauls and Spaniards thundered upon the rear of such as sought safety of the rein, and slew them with steady, measured strokes. Only the consul with perhaps a dozen others were, for the time, safe. They were clear of the rout; within the protecting reach of the great, legionary column, that was but just beginning to move, and they turned, gasping for breath, and, with dazed eyes, watched the flight and pursuit sweep by along the river bank.

XV.

"WITHIN THE RAILS."

It was then that Sergius first realized that Caius Manlius, his friend, the brother of Marcia, was indeed dead ; but the time for such thoughts was short. Clenching his teeth in a paroxysm of anger, he again turned to follow Paullus and Decius, who had passed into the ranks of the legions and joined themselves to the personal volunteers of the pro-consul, Servilius.

The great column was moving now, steadily gathering impetus, and there was little speech between the generals. Servilius gazed with gloomy brows at the consul and the half dozen men that remained to him, and no question as to the fate of the right wing was asked or answered.

"How fight they on the left?" asked Paullus, after a moment's pause.

"The allies skirmish with the Numidians," replied Servilius.

"You mean that the Numidians skirmish with them," said Paullus.

That was all, and the two soldiers turned to their task.

The slingers' bullets fell no longer, or only scattering ones, dropping from above, told that these hornets had fallen back and sought refuge behind their lines; but the roar of battle rolled furiously from the front.

"It is the standards that oppose at last," commented Paullus. "The ranks are not too close — yet. Let us go forward."

Servilius protested, but the other waved him back.

"Here is *your* place who command, my Servilius," said the consul; and a smile, sad rather than bitter, lit up the harsh lines of his face. "It is I, having no command, who can justly ply the sword."

Sergius followed, and in a few moments the increasing pandemonium told that the front was not far ahead. The dust filled their eyes, and they could see nothing beyond; but the signs were for the veteran to read. Soon there was no more headway to be made through the dense mass; the corpses of the slain were thick beneath their feet, half-naked Gauls and Spaniards in white and purple mingled with the dead of the legions, and still the column pushed forward and still the slain lay closer.

"They give ground. We are driving in their centre," gasped Sergius.

Paullus had been frowning grimly, but now he turned to Marcus Decius and showed his wolfish teeth in his old-time smile.

"What do you say, decurion?" he asked.

"We drive them, surely; but—"

"Yes, truly, *but*—do you hear those cries on the flank? We drive their Iberians, their Celts; it is the Africans that let us plunge on like one of Varro's stupid bulls: then they put the sword in our side. Could you fight now? I tell you we are already driven within the rails. If the gods keep Hasdrubal slaying my runaways, there may be hope; if he be a general, there is none."

And still the column's headway seemed hardly checked, though the cries and the clashing of arms resounded, now, from both flanks as well as from the front, while, in the depths of its vitals, men were crushed together till they could scarce breathe. A rumour, too, like those Pan sends to dismay soldiers, ran quickly from heart to heart, rather than from lip to lip. It was that Hasdrubal had circled the rear and, falling upon the allied cavalry, had scattered the left wing as he had the right; that the Numidians pursued and slaughtered: but where

now were the cavalry of Gaul and Spain, the winners of two victories? A sullen roar from the far distant rear seemed to answer; but the language was one that few could read—few of that host. Oh! for an hour of the veterans that slumbered on the shores of Trebia and Trasimenus! Oh! for an hour of Fabius, who lingered at Rome, powerless and discredited. Who were these that wore the armour, that wielded the ponderous javelins of Rome's legions? From under the bronze helmets gorgeously fierce with their great crests peered eyes—stupid, wondering eyes dazed by the uproar, blinded by the dust; eyes wherein, while as yet there was little of fear, still less was there of the knowledge of danger to be met and overcome; eyes that had but lately watched sheep upon the Alban hills, eyes that were used only to the flour dust when their owners kneaded dough behind the Forum.

Ahead, around, the standards were tossing as if upon the billows of an angry sea. Was that a silver horse's head that flashed far to the right?

"Look!" cried Sergius, striking Decius with his elbow.

"You can see better now," muttered the veteran. "The flour is bread, and the bread of battle is mire kneaded of dust and blood."

The eyes of Paullus were turned upward in strange prayer.

"Grant me not, O Jupiter, my life this day!"

It needed no eye of veteran to read the sentence that was writ. Driven, at last, within the rails, as went the saying, there was no room in all that weltering mass to use the sword, much less the pila. On every side the barbarians of Africa, of Spain, of Gaul raged and slew—for even advance now was checked, and the Celts had turned and lashed the front with their great swords that rose and fell, crimson to the hilt, crimson to the shoulder, crimson to every inch of their wielders' huge bodies. The Spaniards, too, were stabbing fast and furiously, while all along both flanks the African squares, between which the weight of the column had forced its narrow length, thrust with their long sarissæ and rained their pilæ upon the doomed monster in their midst: a war elephant, wounded to the death, with sides hung with javelins and streaming with blood, rocking and trumpeting in helpless agony.

Sergius watched the dull, hopeless look deepening in the eyes of the young soldiers. They reminded him of the beeves in the shambles of the elder Varro. Even the voice of Pan could

not wake such men. Were they not there to die for the traditions of Rome? It was true that every path leading to Pan's country bristled with spears, but only a few could fully know this, and these awaited their turn with the rest.

The press seemed to loosen somewhat. Perhaps the assailants had drawn back to gain breath for a final onslaught; but, instinctively, the staggering lines of the Roman column opened out into the space afforded, and its four faces writhed forward bravely, pitifully. It was then that Sergius saw the consul for the last time. He had turned back from where he had forced his way to the head of the column; his arms were battered and blood-stained, and he reeled painfully in his saddle, for Paullus had mounted again, that he might the better be seen by the legionaries. His wandering eyes took in every detail of their hopeless plight; the last sparks of fire seemed to die out in him, and his head drooped upon his chest. Then, slowly, he dismounted, having ordered his horse to kneel, and the beast, unable to rise again, rolled over on its side. Paullus watched it with almost an expression of pity, and then dragged himself to a flat rock and sat down.

Decius had sought to aid him, but the other thrust him rudely back. "It is only the smaller bone," he said. "One of their accursed slingers hit me."

At that moment a rider covered with foam and dust and blood dashed up to the group and, reining his steaming animal to its haunches, leaped to the ground.

Paullus raised his eyes.

"It is time for you to escape, Cneius Lentulus," he said. "You have a horse."

"It is for you, my father; that this day be not further darkened by the death of a consul. My horse is good, and there are still gaps between their squadrons. Ride to the east —"

"And you?"

"I am but a tribune."

"And a young man, my Cneius. Where is Varro?"

"Fled."

"And the pro-consuls?"

"Both fallen."

"And you would have it said, my Cneius, that the Republic degenerates? that not one of this year's consuls dares die with his men, while both of last year's were Romans? Truly, it would be a much darker day should I escape with Varro than if I die with Regulus and Ser-

vilius; besides, I have no humour for further charges and trials, in order that the rabble may vindicate their favourite butcher. But do you go, Cneius, and tell them that you have seen me sitting in my colleague's shambles."

There were tears in Lentulus' eyes, and he still strove to persuade his general to accept the horse, but, at that moment, new shoutings and clashing of arms announced what must prove the final attack.

"They come again, my father," said Decius calmly.

The roar of battle swelled up, all about the doomed column. In front and flanks, Africans, Gauls, and Spaniards charged in unbroken lines, and soon forced the deploying but weakened maniples back into their weltering mass; in the rear, the attack was less continuous, for Hasdrubal's horsemen were exhausted with slaying, and he hurled them in alternate squadrons, now on this point, now on that, wherever the Roman line showed relics of strength or firmness. So the front worked back, driven by sheer weight in the direction where the pressure was least.

Paullus still sat, with drooping head, faint with fatigue and loss of blood, while Decius, Sergius, and Lentulus stood by him, helplessly

awaiting the end. A rush of fugitives swept by and almost overwhelmed the wounded man; but Decius passed his arm around him, and the press slackened.

"It is time for you to mount and ride, Cneius Lentulus;" and the consul raised his head again, while the old-time spirit of command flashed in his eyes. "You shall be my envoy to the fathers. Bid them fortify and garrison the city; go—"

A new rush broke in upon his words,—a rush, in which the whole front was borne back a spear's length beyond them. Sergius was thrown down, but some one raised him, dazed and stunned, and seemed to bear him along. A moment, and he found himself standing once more upon his feet. Cneius Lentulus and his horse were gone; Paullus and Marcus Decius were left alone far beyond—no, not alone. He saw the tunics of the Iberians, now all as purple as their borders, thronging around; he saw his general and his comrade give their throats to the sharp, slender swords; and then he saw, far ahead, amid the Carthaginian syntagmata, a swarthy, smiling face with crisp, curling beard; he saw the brown-bronze corselet rich with gold, the meteor helmet with ostrich plumes floating between its horns, the

snowy mantle bordered with Tyrian purple; and he saw the white head of the horse whose feet needed now no dye of art to stain them vermilion. All the fury of battle, all the madness of revenge overwhelmed him in an instant; despair was gone, thoughts of past and future were swept away by the surge of one overmastering idea: he must reach that man and kill him. He looked around at the scattered, reeling maniples. A standard bearer was lying at his feet, striving with his remnant of strength to wrench the silver eagle from its staff, that he might hide it under his cloak; but the death rattle came too quickly. Sergius picked up the standard.

"Come," he said, "there is the enemy." And then, without a glance to note whether his appeal was regarded, he rushed blindly forward.

It was a discipline inspired by tradition rather than taught by drills and punishments that came to the Roman recruit, and now it played its part. These peasants, these artisans whose eyes had seen naught save unaccustomed horrors through all the day, turned at once to answer the summons of the eagle. Sergius heard the feeble shout of battle that rose behind him, heard the scattered clanging of sword and shield, and when he struck the long pikes of

the first square, it was with the force of half a dozen broken maniples welded into a solid mass.

Still the sarissæ held firm. Perhaps two lines went down, but the pilæ rained their slant courses from the rear; the feeble rush was stopped, and the legionaries struggled helplessly upon the spears. Sergius saw nothing but the dark, bearded face among the squares — scarcely nearer than before. Had he not read in a little book written by one, Xenophon, a Greek, and purchased, at great cost, at the shop of Milo, the bookseller in the Argiletum, how Oriental armies won or lost by the life or death of their leaders? He would kill Hannibal! Would to the gods that Paullus had fallen in the Cinctus Gabinus! Paullus, too much of an infidel to think of such old-time immolation; but there was yet one last appeal.

Seizing the tough staff of the standard almost at the end, he whirled it around his head and let it go at full swing; the silver eagle flashed in the light of the setting sun, as it described great arcs, and plunged down amid the hostile ranks; a hoarse cry went up: the very deity of the legion was amid its foes! no Roman so untried as not to hear its call. The short swords hacked and stabbed among the spears;

the first square swayed and rocked, shivered into fragments, and, hurled back upon the second, bore it, too, down in the mingled rush of pursuers and pursued. On every side of the dwindling band of assailants, front, flanks, and rear, the pikes dipped and plunged, the Gallic swords hissed through the air, the Spaniards ravened and stabbed; but, to the Romans, flanks and rear were nothing: it was the front, the Libyans, the lost eagle.

And now, at last, it was won; the advance had been checked by the closer welding of the syntagmata, half his men were down; but Sergius, still unhurt, had stooped and raised the standard, kissing its crimson beak and wings. Then he looked up.

Half the space between himself and the bearded horseman had vanished, and the latter was no longer talking carelessly with those about. His steady gaze was fixed upon the young Roman, as if studying the exact measure of strength that remained to him. There was nothing else for it. Again the great staff described great circles through the air, and again the crimson eagle soared and stooped, and the white stallion reared and snorted, as it struck the earth before him; again the shattered fragment of an army hurled

itself, wounded and weary and bleeding, among the ever thickening spears; yes, and forced its way a quarter, half the remaining distance, until Sergius, whose eyes had never for a moment forsaken those of the Carthaginian, saw them grow troubled, saw the black, bushy brows draw together. Then his enemy turned and spoke a few hurried words to an attendant, gesticulating freely, until the man whirled his horse about and drove back through the throng. When Sergius looked into the face of the general again, it wore a disdainful smile—the smile of a Zeus that watches the sons of Aloeus pile mountain on mountain in the vain effort to storm Olympus. Again Hannibal was careless and unconcerned; again he laughed and joked gayly with his attendants; his soldier's eye had set the limit of Rome's last paroxysm, and it fell short of the spot where he sat—not by much, but enough. All that remained was for the arrows of Apollo to do their work, and now he had set these to the string.

Wearily and yet more wearily the wolves bit and tore their way; then they came staggering to a stand, three spear lengths from the lost eagle, and then the pressure behind seemed to slacken, and the serried spears in front bore them slowly backward.

All was over. Sergius' eyes, dim and blood-shot, wandered, at last, from the contemptuous smile that had held them, and rested upon the score of men, for the most part wounded, that remained about him. For an instant the spears and swords ceased their work, and the dense mass of lowering faces that surrounded the last of the legions rolled back. Lanes appeared between the syntagmata; a chorus of wild cries swelled up—swept nearer, and the furious riders of the desert came galloping through every interspace. To them had been granted, for a mark of honour, the ending of the battle. It was only a single rush, a brandishing and plunging of javelins retained in grasp, a little more blood spattered upon the horses' necks and bellies. No legionary was standing when the tempest had gone by, and there, among his men, with face turned from the red earth to the reddening sky, lay Lucius Sergius Fidenas, in slumber fitting for a Roman patrician when the black day of Cannæ was done.

PART II.



CHAPTER I.

THE QUEEN OF THE WAYS.

THERE was much bustle and confusion throughout the little inn at Sinuessa. August was just closing, and the midday summer sun beat down too fiercely to permit of comfortable travel save toward morning or night. The inn-keeper had hurried out and stood in the roadway, bowing and wreathing his face with smiles of welcome, while, behind him, were grouped his servants, each bearing some implement of his or her calling—a muster well calculated to impress the wayfarer with the assurance of comfort and good cheer.

The occasion of all this demonstration was a party that had halted, apparently for refreshment and the customary traveller's siesta; a rheda or four-wheeled travelling carriage, closely covered and drawn by three powerful horses yoked abreast. Two armed outriders, one apparently a freedman and the other a slave, made up the company, the former of whom, a

stout, elderly man with gray hair and beard, had reined in his horse before the obsequious host, while the other remained by the carriage wheel, as if to aid the driver in guarding the rheda's occupants from intrusion.

The innkeeper, short and fat, was breathing hard from the haste in which he had sallied out, but his words came volubly:—

“Let the gentlemen alight and enter—or, if they be ladies, so much the better. They shall make trial of the best inn along the whole length of the Queen of Ways. Such couches as they have never seen, save, doubtless, in their magnificent homes, fit for the gods to lie upon!—such dishes!—such cooking! guinea-hens fed and fattened under my own eye, mullet fresh from the water with all greens of the season, and such wine as only the Massic Mount can grow—”

Here, however, he paused to take breath, and the freedman succeeded in interrupting the flow of words.

“By the gods! will you be silent?” he said. “Perhaps we shall try your fare, if you do not take up the whole day in telling us about it. First, however, it is necessary for us to learn certain things. How many miles is it to Capua?”

The innkeeper's face took on a grieved look in place of the beaming smile of a moment since, but he answered promptly and humbly: —

“The matter of twenty-five miles, my master.”

“At what hour do they close the gates?”

The innkeeper glanced back at the group of domestics with a frightened expression.

“That is a military question,” he said. “How can I answer it in these times? It is dangerous to talk about such things.”

“Not dangerous for you,” insisted the other, rather scornfully. “Since you Campanians have become pulse-eaters, not the wildest Numidian would dare disturb you. The cruel one is very tender of you all — *now*; but wait till Rome shall fall, then you will know what his tenderness is worth — when you are all busy grinding corn for Carthage —”

“By all the gods! speak lower — if you must say such words,” whispered the innkeeper, white with terror. “If one of my servants should betray me! Like enough the gate is closed at all times. It is said that Hannibal enters the town to-night.”

“Hannibal in Capua to-night!” came a voice from the rheda — a woman's voice, softly and delicately modulated, yet deep and rich in its tones. At the same moment the curtains were

drawn aside, and she looked out, beckoning imperiously to the would-be host. "Come near, my good man, I wish to speak with you more closely."

The innkeeper stood as one dazed, with open mouth and bulging eyes. He had looked upon great and beautiful ladies before, for many such travelled by the Appian Way, but the beauty and the nobility of this face seemed to him more than mortal. With all the grace, all the freshness, all the radiant charm of the girl Marcia, were now joined the calm and deep-eyed crown of womanhood. The perfect lines that could so perfectly respond to playful or tender emotions were still unmarred, and yet sorrow that had left no other trace had endowed them with new possibilities of devotion and high resolve.

"Come," repeated Marcia, and the little innkeeper trotted up to the rheda and stood watching her with an expression of canine wonder and subservience in his big, dull eyes.

"Did I not hear you say that Hannibal was to be in Capua to-night? Have these false Campanians indeed carried out the treachery rumoured of them?"

The man had forgotten all his fears of a few moments since, nor did the slur upon his race

rouse aught of indignation. Held fast under the spell of the dark eyes before him, he made haste to answer: —

“The rumour, madam, that a traveller left with me some hours since is that Marius Blossius, prætor of Campania, has led all Capua out to meet Hannibal, who is to feast to-night at the house of the Nini Celeres, Stenius and Pacuvius —”

“But how was this done?” she interrupted. “It was said at Rome that some few evil spirits, like Vibius Virrius and Pacuvius Calavius, were ill-disposed, but surely the senators of Capua are faithful?”

“I do not know as to that,” said the fellow, with the stubborn dulness of a peasant; “but I know it is hard to see your property and goods destroyed and to hold fast to allies who do not protect you — and a Roman garrison at Casilinum all the time. They say this African is kind to his friends, and then, too, he sent home my son without ransom when the young man was prisoner in the north — some battle by some lake that I forget the name of —”

“Such talk is well enough for the poor-spirited rabble,” cried Marcia, impetuously; “but was there none of noble blood in the city? None who could compel duty?”

A look of cunning crossed his face as he answered :—

“Pacuvius Calavius took care of that. He cooped up the senate in the senate-house, by telling them the people sought their lives. Then he went out and spoke against them to that same people, and offered to surrender them for death, one by one; and then, when they had given up hope, he made a clever turn and persuaded us to forego their just punishment. So it is said in Capua that Pacuvius Calavius bought the senators for his slaves, and not one but runs to do his bidding. Senators, you see, do not like the rods and axe any better than humbler people like the sword and the torch.”

Marcia eyed him with disgust. Then her brow cleared. “What could be expected from such a man,” she thought. “Surely not exalted patriotism or high ideals—especially when the class question had been brought into play against public faith and public honour. Mere stupidity would yoke him to the side that seemed to promise the most immediate exemptions or rewards. It was possible, though, that the situation might not be as bad as it was painted; that there might still be faithful men in the second city of Italy—men who, while at present held down by the skilful plotting of their ene-

mies or the hopelessness of open resistance, were yet waiting, vigilant to seize upon the first promising opportunity to recover the lost ground. On the other hand, innkeepers were apt to be a well-informed class, as to public happenings, and this man told his tale with parrot-like precision. At any rate, there was nothing to do but reach Capua as soon as possible; for, the Carthaginian commander once within the walls, no one could tell what precautions and scrutiny might be established at the gates.

She turned to the freedman.

"There is no time for resting and refreshment, Ligurius. We must not lose the chance of entering the city before nightfall;" and to the man who rode at the wheel: "Come, Caipor. A little weariness will not hurt us."

The driver's whip curled about the horses' flanks, and they started forward; but the disappointed innkeeper laid hold of one of the poles that supported the covering of the rheda and gasped and sputtered as he ran:—

"What now! Would you die of the heat? Am I to lose my custom because I am good-natured and tell the news?"

Caipor turned in his seat and raised the thong used to urge on his animal; but Marcia,

hearing the clamour, thrust the curtain aside again and, motioning the slave to restrain himself, threw several denarii to her would-be host. At the same moment, the horses suddenly quickened their gait, and the pursuer, keeping his hold, was jerked flat upon his face.

"Be cautious!" shouted Caipor. "There is silver in the dust you are swallowing," and they hurried on, unable to distinguish whether the half-choked ejaculations that followed them were thanks or curses.

There was a short silence punctuated by the cracking of the whip, the clatter of hoofs, and the crunching of wheels along the pavement; then the curtains once more parted slightly, and Caipor, watchful to serve, saw Marcia's beckoning hand and drew closer to the rheda.

"Bend down," she said, and, as he obeyed, she whispered:—

"You were my brother's servant, Caipor, and you bear his name. Will you help me to avenge him?"

The slave's eyes flashed, and he straightened himself on his horse. Then he lowered his head to hear more.

"Ligurius," she continued, "will be brave and faithful to my family in all things. I want one who will be faithful to what is greater and

to what is less — to Rome and to me. I seek safety for the Republic ; and I seek revenge for those who are dead. Will you help me when Ligurius halts ? ”

“ The cross itself will not daunt me,” he said simply. “ Whatever you shall do, lady, I will be faithful to the death.”

“ For me, perhaps, to the death, Caipor,” she answered ; “ but for you, if the gods favour me, to life and to freedom.”

His cheek flushed with the rich blood of his Samnite ancestors, and, as Ligurius glanced back from his post at the head of the party, the young man made his horse bound forward, lest his attitude and perturbation might bring some suspicion of a secret conference to the mind of the old freedman.

So they descended within the hemicycle of hills. The heights of Mount Tifata began to fall away on the left, the rough, precipitous line of crags, sweeping around toward the east, seemed to dwindle into the distance, even as they drew nearer, while the low jumble of Neapolitan hills, beyond which towered Vesuvius with its fluttering pennon of vapour, rose higher and higher upon the southern horizon. A turn of the road, a temporary makeshift, led them around Casilinum, whose little garri-

son lay close, nor opened their gates to friend or foe. There, at last, in the midst of the level plain that stretched down to the sea, lay Capua, gleaming white and radiant beneath the brush of the now descending sun.

Gradually the great sweep of city walls grew lowering and massive. It still lacked an hour of sunset, and the travellers had not urged themselves unduly through the midday course. The foam, yellowed and darkened by dust, had dried upon the horses' flanks save only where the chafing of the harness kept it fresh and white. Marcia leaned far out of the rheda and gazed eagerly at the nearing town, Caipor seemed scarcely able to restrain his eagerness to dash forward, while Ligurius shaded his eyes with his hand and viewed the spectacle like a general counting the power of his approaching foe. Even at this distance they saw, or began to imagine they saw, some indescribable change, — not a flurry of motion or excitement, — they were too far away to note that, had such been present. It was as though above, around every tower and battlement hung an atmosphere of hostility and defiance; yet this was the friend of Rome through days of weal and days of woe, — the second city of Italy.

Nearer and nearer they drew. The horses

threw their heads in the air, and, presaging rest and provender, quickened their pace, without urging. Suddenly an exclamation burst from the lips of Ligurius.

"Look!" he cried. "It is true. They are indeed here." Marcia and Caipor strove to follow his hand. "My northern eyes, old though they be, are better than yours of the south. Do you not see them — one, two, three! Gods! They are thick on the walls."

"What? in the name of Jove!" exclaimed Marcia, impatiently, and then Caipor started.

"I see! I see now," he cried. "Ah! mistress, they are the standards of Carthage; the horses' heads, yellow, with red manes. Gods, how they glitter! Gold and blood — gold and blood!"

"Drive on," said Marcia, for they had all drawn rein, half unconsciously, and she lay back, behind the curtains of the rheda.

II.

THE GATE.

A HARSH cry of command or warning rang out ahead, and the rheda stopped short with a jolt. Ligurius had thrown his horse upon his haunches and then backed him so as to take post at that side of the vehicle unprotected by Caipor ; but, a moment later, the rush of a dozen tall figures thrust them both away, the curtains were torn aside, and Marcia looked out into savage faces and great, staring, blue eyes. Three or four overlapping circlets of iron just above the hips seemed the limit of these men's defensive armour, and the skin of some animal was thrown about the brawny shoulders of such as had not replaced their barbaric mantles with the Roman military cloak ; the hair of each, black or red, but always long and indescribably filthy, was caught up in a knot at the top of the head, whence it streamed away, loose or matted, like the tail of an unkempt horse ; their feet were bare, and their legs were covered by linen breeches bound close with leathern thongs. It

needed not the great broad-swords slung about their shoulders to tell them for Hannibal's Gauls — creatures scarcely half human, whose name brought terror to the Roman maiden of the days of Cannæ, as the sight of them had carried death or slavery to her less-favoured sister of the blacker days of the Allia.

But Marcia showed little of womanish weakness. To the jargon of a dozen voices — a jargon that sounded like the yelping and barking of a pack of dogs — she opposed a cold and dignified silence. A dozen hands reached out to touch her, as they would touch something strange and admirable; but she drew back, and the rude hands and staring, blue eyes fell before the flash of her indignation.

At that instant, a man strode forward, hurling the soldiers from his path to right and left, or striking them fiercely with his staff. Taller by almost half a head than the others, his richer vesture and arms, but, above all, the gold collar about his neck and the gold bracelets upon his arms, marked the chief. Standing by the rheda, he met Marcia's look of proud defiance, for a moment; then his eyes shifted and seemed to wander; but, cloaking with martial sternness the embarrassment of the barbarian, he spoke in Gallic:—

"Who are you?"

Unable to understand the question, much less to answer it, she turned away and ignored both the man and his words. Again the look of indecision and embarrassment returned to his face; but, glancing round, he saw Ligurius struggling in the hands of his captors, and caught some words of Gallic in his half-throttled remonstrances.

"Bring him," he said shortly, with a motion of his staff, and the freedman, who had been roughly pulled from his horse, was thrust forward, his clothes hanging in tatters, and his face bruised and bleeding from his efforts to break loose and guard his mistress from intrusion or insult.

"Who is *she*, and who are you?" asked the chief, sternly; for his eyes, now that they looked into those of a man and an inferior, had regained all their wild fierceness.

Ligurius hesitated, partly from lack of wind and partly from a doubt as to how much or what it would be wise to tell.

"Speak!" cried the other, impatiently.

Marcia threw aside the curtains which had been allowed to fall back in their place, and leaned out. The scene looked critical; the Gaul's face was working with nervous irritation,

while his followers, scarcely recovered from his sudden onslaught, stood around in a ring, some fingering their swords, and with expressions whose wonder and stupidity seemed fast giving place to the lust of blood and plunder. Caipor had been knocked senseless at the beginning, and the driver was in the hands of several soldiers.

Ligurius looked inquiringly at his mistress.

"He asks who we are," he said. "What shall I say?"

"Ah! you plot to deceive me," cried the Gaul, losing control of his temper, and, before Marcia could answer, he struck the freedman down with his staff. One of his followers shifted his sword belt, and, half drawing the great weapon, stepped forward; but Marcia had sprung from the rheda, and stood, with clenched hands and flashing eyes, above her prostrate attendant.

"Bandits! Murderers!" she cried. "Does your general permit you to rob and kill travelers that seek to enter a friendly city?"

Understanding the act rather than the words, the soldier halted, and the chief's eyes began again to shift nervously; but soon an expression of mingled lust and cunning came into them.

"You are beautiful," he said. "You shall not die, you shall dwell in my hut."

Marcia shuddered at the glance and change of tone. He reached out his arms, tattooed in blue designs, and made as if to advance. She drew a dagger from her girdle. Infuriated by the sight of what he took to be a hostile weapon, the barbarian's sword was out in an instant. Then he perceived that the dagger was directed not at his breast, but at the woman's. The point of the great sword, already half raised, dropped slowly to the ground, and a new look of embarrassed amazement took the place of the momentary glare of savage fury.

How it would have ended never transpired, for a commotion at the gate attracted the attention of all. A small detachment of soldiers were advancing, at a leisurely pace, headed by a young officer whose arms blazed with gold and silver. No Hannibalian veterans these. As they came near, even Marcia could note the sleek, soft look of the men, and their listless, muscleless gait; while their leader's hair and person literally reeked with perfumes. His eyes turned slowly from the huge Gaul to the woman; then a flash of animation lent them light.

"How is this?" he asked. "Why this tumult? Who are these people?"

The Gaul shook his head defiantly, as if ignorant of the speech of his interrogator, while his followers began to nudge each other, pointing out the round limbs and fresh complexions of the Capuans, and laughing scornfully.

The young officer flushed, and, turning to Marcia, repeated the question.

"I am a Roman. Do you not understand my tongue?" she said.

He glanced fearfully at the Gauls. Then, reassured by their evident failure to comprehend, he regained his assurance and answered:—

"Surely, lady, an educated Capuan cannot fail to understand all languages, civilized or barbarous. I speak the Greek, the Roman—all; only permit me to beg you to be less frank in naming your city: 'Roman' is a dangerous word to use here. What has led one so beautiful and so accomplished to run the risk of such a journey? Do you not know that Hannibal and his men are in Capua? That is why these beasts have been able to disturb you; but fear not," he continued, as she was about to speak, "*I* also am here to protect you," and he accompanied the words with a glance that left the nature of the protection offered more than equivocal.

Suppressing her mingled feelings of disgust and amusement, Marcia answered haughtily:—

"May Jove favour you for your offer; but has it come that the expected guest of Pacuvius Calavius needs protection at the gate of Capua?"

Amazement and deference were at once apparent in his changed manner.

"Ah!" he said slowly, as if trying to gather his wits; "that is different—very different. It is a double regret that these vermin have troubled you; but you are safe now."

Marcia found herself wondering whether he would allude to the Gauls so scornfully had they been able to understand his words.

The Capuan turned to the Gallic chief, who, together with his followers, had drawn nearer.

"Make way!" he cried. "Loose the slave that drives." Then to his own men, "Raise up the two that are hurt;" and to Marcia, "And you, lady; will it please you to return to your carriage?"

But the Gauls, although evidently understanding the nature of his orders, showed no disposition to obey them. On the contrary, at a few words from their chief, they pushed closer yet, and some of them even began to jostle the soldiers of the Capuan guard. A light blow or a sharp word bade fair to precipitate a conflict that, despite the numerical equality, could

hardly be doubtful in its outcome, when a sharp, commanding voice rang out behind.

All swung around, as if to meet a blow, and the press opened. A rider, glittering in arms of simple but rich design, and mounted upon a black horse, was advancing from the gate. Two Spaniards, who rode several spear lengths behind him, were his sole escort; but, alone or at the head of a legion, it was all the same: no eye of Gaul or Capuan saw aught but the one horseman; and yet it was not easy to tell wherein the force lay. He was a young man, probably twenty — possibly twenty-five, for life advanced quickly under the sun of Africa. His figure was slender and boyish, his face thinly bearded, a lack which was accentuated by the beard being divided into two points. Yes, *now* they saw; it was his eyes that had dispelled the boast and swagger of the Gaul, the superciliousness of the Capuan, and whatever of brawling boldness had been in either. These eyes were black and large and flashing with courage and energy and the pride of noble birth. No detail of the scene seemed to escape their first glance, and he asked no question, as he rode into the crowd.

"Ardix," he said, addressing the Gaul in his own tongue, "back to your gate! and you,"

turning to the Capuan officer and changing his language with ready ease, "it would be wise for you to consider the unwisdom of quarrelling with our veterans."

There was just enough of contempt in the inference of the last word to check the flow of explanation and complaint that was rising to the lips of the young exquisite. The newcomer had turned his back. The Capuan saw his followers slinking away with Ardix and his Gauls. It was hard to lose a chance of talking with a great man, and surely a few of the words he could choose and speak so well would compel the Carthaginian to value him at his worth. Still, there was something that impressed upon him the unwisdom of speech, and, after a moment of embarrassed indecision, he turned and strode away after the rest, seeking to conceal the humiliation of his retreat by the swagger of his gait and the fierceness of his expression — which there was no one to see.

While this little comedy was passing, he, whose advent had been its occasion, was regarding Marcia fixedly; but he now looked into eyes that neither quailed nor wandered before his own. At last he spoke, and in Latin: —

"I am Mago, the son of Hamilcar. What

brings a Roman woman to Capua in these days?"

This youth, then, was the famous brother of Hannibal; the commander of the ambush at the Trebia. His voice was cold, harsh, and metallic, and in his eyes there was none of the rude lust of the Gaul or the polished licentiousness of the Capuan. They burned only with the fires that light the souls of patriots and leaders of men.

"I come," said Marcia, slowly, "for several reasons, and believing that Carthage does not make war upon women."

The eyes lost nothing of their cold scrutiny at the implied compliment or the covert reproach.

"And what reasons?" he asked sharply.

"For the one," replied Marcia, and she was conscious of an effort in holding her voice to its steady inflection; "that my house is bound in hospitality to that of Pacuvius Calavius —"

Mago's brow cleared for an instant.

"Our friend," he said. "He is married to one of your Claudians." Then it darkened again as he continued: "Well, and you seek him for what? To tempt him back to Rome?"

"I seek him," said Marcia, boldly, "because I am wise. Have I not seen the narrowing of

Rome's resources? the quarrels of the factions? I have come from there, and I tell you that, if Hannibal have patience until the spring, it is Rome that will beg him to take her. What part has a woman with a man who cannot protect himself! Let her look for a new defender, if she be wise."

An odd look had come into the Carthaginian's face as she spoke, a look more scornful but less threatening.

"You speak true woman's philosophy," he said. "That is the philosophy of these times. I am convinced that there *were* days, and women — but pah! now it is only glory that is worthy to be a man's bride. Come, I will lead you to the house of Calavius."

Ligurius had recovered sufficiently to remount his horse, while Mago's attendants had laid the still senseless Caipor in the rheda to which their master now assisted Marcia. Then he rode on, by the wheel of the carriage.

As for the daughter of Torquatus, not even the consciousness of her purpose, and of the high and bitter motives that had shaped it, could drive the touch of shame from her cheeks. It galled her when she considered how she must appear to this man — a mere youth and a Carthaginian, and it galled her the more that

she should care for his opinion. That she had inspired only his contempt, was quite evident; and she, whose glances had always gone straight as the arrows of Love to the hearts of men, now found herself more annoyed by the indifference of an enemy than she had been by the dangers from which he had rescued her. She was not certain whether it was with a desire to gain in his sight, or only in the pursuance of her plans, that she spoke again.

"Does my lord think worse of me for what I have said?"

"I thought you a woman; now I know you for one," he replied, carelessly.

"Ah! but my lord did not ask as to my other reasons for seeking the camp of Carthage."

"That is a matter for Calavius to look to. If you come as an enemy — so much the worse for him."

"And if I come as a woman who would escape a hated marriage — to seek a lover who has won her heart afar off? —"

"Calavius?" laughed Mago, the boy in him suddenly flashing out. "They say even the old men here are hunters of women. Have a care of the Claudian, though. She may bite."

Marcia flushed crimson. Mago was not an

easy subject for female influence. Besides, she began to realize that the respect she could not help feeling for the attitude of the young soldier might hamper whatever efforts she could put forth to ensnare and control him. His closeness to Hannibal, however, would make his conquest as advantageous as it seemed difficult, and it was some such thought as this that prompted her next words.

"Happy the leader and brother that has so single and so firm a counsellor!"

She spoke as if half unconsciously, but Mago shot a sharp glance straight into her eyes. Then he answered, carelessly:—

"My brother is the captain-general of Carthage, and I am only a young soldier. Doubtless he is wise to ignore my opinions; and yet, had he harkened to Maharbal and myself at the close of the day of Cannæ — had he let us press on with the cavalry and followed, with such speed as the gods could grant, — I am convinced that within five days he had supped in the Capitol."

His tone changed, as he spoke, to one of fierce enthusiasm, and his listener shuddered. Then, sinking his voice, he went on, as if speaking to himself:—

"Even now — even now — before the winter

closes in, there might be a chance. Later, they will recover strength and courage, and we — we shall become — Capuans.”

Marcia hid her agitation behind the curtains of the rheda. She was terrified by his vehemence and by the justice of his reasoning. Here was the man whose whole influence would be pitted against the purpose of her journey; and her woman's intuition told her that no argument or allurements could turn his mind. It was with a feeling of relief that the halting of the vehicle before the porch of a stately house checked the unwise retort that trembled on her lips. Later, she could oppose him better than if, yielding now to an impulse to controvert his views, she had aroused suspicion.

III.

PACUVIUS CALAVIUS.

THE house of Pacuvius Calavius was well situated, near the centre of the town, accessible to the Forum, and upon a street of considerable width. The porch of the ostium was supported by four columns delicately fluted and painted, the lower half in dull crimson, the upper in ochre. A porter, in costume much richer than those worn by most free Romans, lounged on a stool set upon the mosaic pavement, and roused himself lazily to shuffle down and inquire why the rheda had halted before his door.

“Ah! It was a lady”—and he smirked with insolent meaning—“who desired to see his master?” He threw out his hands with a deprecatory gesture. “The gods were, in truth, very friendly to Pacuvius Calavius; but then he was very old—a complaint which few could guard against. Oh!—”

Mago had signalled to one of his horsemen, and the soldier's lash whistled and wound itself

about the slave's neck. All the fellow's laziness and insolence vanished, and he fell upon the pavement, writhing and whimpering.

"Lash the hound till he does his office," said Mago, quietly; and the short hand-thong rose again.

But before it descended a second time, the porter had rolled and scrambled to his feet, and was rushing to open the door. He vanished with wonderful speed, and, a moment later, there appeared a man somewhat above middle age, with a close-curling, white beard, and clad in a robe so heavily embroidered with gold as to leave the ground colour a matter of conjecture. With keen eyes that shifted nervously, he hurried down toward the rheda. Then, noting Mago, and that he was a Carthaginian of rank, he paused, uncertain, and his salutation savoured somewhat of over-respect.

"A lady?" he said hesitatingly; — "a lady who desires to see me?"

Marcia parted the curtains and leaned out, smiling. The newcomer stopped short and gasped in astonishment.

Mago glanced sharply from one to the other, and his lip curled. He signed to his attendants, and, with an obeisance that had in it haughtiness rather than courtesy, he rode away.

Glancing cautiously up and down the street, Calavius approached the rheda.

"And is it the lady Marcia who is to honour my house?" he began, in words that carried more welcome than did the tone. "A dangerous journey in these days, and a dangerous destination. Surely you are welcome — and who was the young man that rode with you? Did he know anything of your name and birth? I trust you were cautious? —"

Marcia laughed.

"Do not fear, father;" Calavius frowned slightly at the venerable title, and shook out his robe that the odours might permeate the air. "Do not fear but that I was as cunning as your Campanians. I told him I was a Roman — wherefore not? For the matter of that, he divined it. He is Mago, the brother of Hannibal —"

"And he brought you here?" cried Calavius, trembling now in good earnest. "Surely it was done to ruin me; but whose plot? — whose plot?"

"It is not necessary I should be your guest," said Marcia, with well-feigned indifference. "Doubtless there are inns; but he guided me here because I asked for your house, imagining that my father's friend would have a welcome for my father's daughter."

Calavius instantly recovered his composure.

"Ah! dear lady," he began, in a voice from which all the tremor had vanished, "and do you dream for a moment that you should taste of other hospitality than mine? Will you not descend—nay, I will help you—and let us enter quickly. These are indeed troublous days, and every door creaks a warning; troublous days, with each man's hand against his neighbour, plotting by necessity, often, rather than by preference. What! your attendants are hurt?" Again his voice shook. "A brawl? that is bad; but come within. It is there you shall tell me of it all."

So speaking, he assisted Marcia to descend, and, summoning his servants, gave the rheda and its guardians into their care. Then he led the way into his house, carefully fastening the street door behind them, for the porter evidently had not halted in his flight, short of the slaves' apartments upstairs.

Marcia followed, wondering at the magnificence of the decorations. She passed through passages lighted by hanging-lamps of gold and silver and bronze; past walls rich with frescoes in black and yellow and red; panels and pictures such as Caius Fabius Pictor could never have dreamed when he ornamented the Temple

of Safety; frescoes that so far surpassed the work of Damophilus and Gorgasus upon the walls of Ceres, as these had surpassed the art of Pictor himself. Then came courts surrounded by rows of fluted columns, set with fountains that threw light sprays of scented water over the flowers and the garments of the passers; then more passages, with paintings of even greater merit and delicacy of execution, mingled, here and there, with scenes where the delicacy was of the execution alone, and that brought hot blushes to her cheek. Amid all, were scattered richly carved pedestals bearing beautiful statues done in marble or bronze, or great vases, black or terra-cotta, with intricately composed groups of figures in the opposite tint. It came like a veritable revelation to one who had known nothing but the crude art of the Etruscans and the cruder handicraft of her own people, tempered, as they were, by the taste of such Greek artists as fell so far short of their native ideals as to be willing to waste their skill upon barbarians. She had heard of the wealth and luxury of the Capuans, but it had never entered her mind to imagine that the luxury of Capua could demand, or the wealth of Campania purchase, pictures whose distance and proportions were

true to life itself, and statues that seemed veritably to live and breathe. Her eyes were big with wonder and admiration, when her guide and host turned sharply to the right and ushered her into a small room that looked out through a row of slender pillars into a portico beyond, and thence into a garden that seemed a very forest of small rose trees. Around the walls ran a shelf upon which were set a number of circular boxes, while lying upon the table were several bulky rolls of papyrus, in parchment wrappers stained yellow or purple.

"My library," said Calavius, in a careless tone, but with a wave of his arm that showed his pride in its possession. "Three hundred and eighty-nine works—the best, and of the most excellent authors:—poets, philosophers, historians, rhetoricians—all that is worth reading. No man in Capua has a better show of literature—unless, perhaps, it be Decius Magius," and his voice sank, as if the name had brought him back to a realization of circumstances. "Here I can read without disturbance, and here we can talk without fear of interruption or listening ears. There are slaves always stationed at both ends of the portico, to insure quiet."

"And you are the man who has dared to

turn Capua over to the enemies of Rome! Truly, I cannot understand."

Marcia could not restrain the words, and Calavius flushed.

"Do not condemn me for timidity," he said quickly. "These are dangerous seas for a man of mark to steer his craft upon. Carthaginians and other barbarians are not citizens of Capua — no refinement — no civilization. Much has happened to disturb me — to unsettle my nerves. Decius Magius has been parading in the Forum, defying our friends, — and who with him but my own son, Perolla, casting discredit on my plans, and danger on himself! It was with the utmost difficulty I could drag him away — and then, what does the Carthaginian do but fly into a rage, and demand an audience of the senate, with a view to punishing Decius. Nothing but my influence and that of Virrius and the Ninii have persuaded him to forego his purpose for the time; and that, only, by pleading the joy of this day, and that it should be given to nothing save festivity and feasting. Truly, my mind misgives me. Still, they have sworn that no Carthaginian shall have any power over a Campanian, and — was not that a noise in the portico?"

He rose and, gliding out to the row of pillars,

looked up and down. Marcia regarded him with contempt and pity.

"And yet," she said, "it is for this terror and distrust that you have betrayed Rome. Were there none of our soldiers and citizens in the town?"

"Do not speak of it," whispered Calavius, growing even paler;—"a most frightful misfortune! They were taken in arms, or at their business—what matters it which?—and confined in the baths for safe-keeping."

"And then?" said Marcia, for he paused.

"And then some evil-disposed persons turned on the vapour."

"They were killed?" she cried.

"Not so loud!—not so loud! for the love of all the gods! It was a mistake, a terrible mistake!"

"Ah! guest-friend of my father," said Marcia, sadly; "I fear it is a mistake that Rome will exact a heavy price for. You say truly that it matters not how they were taken."

"But I swear it was no will of mine!" he cried, and then, fearing lest he had committed himself too deeply, he went on. "In fact, lady, they say too much, who set this revolution at my door; who say that I was the mover of all. Was it not Vibius Virrius who first suggested

it? Was it not Marius Blossius, the prætor, who led out the people to meet the Carthaginians? — and see how my son is still with Rome! No, by Bacchus! there are many here a thousand times more guilty — if it be guilt, and on whom the rods and axes must fall first if there be justice under the gods. You can bear witness at Rome to that.”

“There will be rods and axes enough for all,” said Marcia, grimly, filled with horror and disgust for the deeds told of, and with contempt for this garrulous, timid plotter of treachery and murder. Then, suddenly, she noted a sinister glitter in his eye, and, at the same time, remembering her mission, she checked her words and went on, “Rods and axes enough for all who are so feeble as not to take the sovereignty of Italy when it lies within their grasp.”

“What — what is that you say?” he said eagerly, and the threat fled from his face. “The sovereignty of Italy? Ah! it is a great prize! Who shall deny it to us? Are we not the second city? Have we not allies the strongest in the world? — a general the greatest? and when all is over, who so fitting to rule as the first man of the first city? — for Rome will be no more. Ah! I will deal with them gently, though; I will conciliate — unless I be

opposed too obstinately. You shall tell them that. Are they meditating surrender? Do they not see that we must prevail? — but,” and his tone changed again to distrust, “I have forgotten to ask, amid my anxiety about matters of state, why you have come to Capua — a Roman — at such times?”

Marcia laughed. She was ready for her part now, and this adversary, at least, she despised, — perhaps too much, for he was a cunning man, in his way, and when the matter demanded only chicanery against other cowards.

“Ah! my Pacuvius, a politician like *you* asks me that?” she exclaimed gayly. “Is it for a woman to remain in a ship buffeted and rocking in the storm? a ship that must founder soon, if it be but left to itself?”

“Is that truth?” he asked eagerly, but with a tinge of suspicion in his voice.

“Surely, it is truth: as it is truth that I, with many other women, have gone out to such cities where there are friends of our houses — cities friendly to the new powers, friends strong enough to give us shelter and protection. It is my happy fortune to have found a city and a friend the strongest of all.”

Calavius smiled complacently and stroked his beard.

"Yes, you have done well," he said slowly. "I am not without interest with the captain-general of Carthage, and there may be yet greater things in store for me. I will go now and send female attendants to you, that you may seek the bath and your room, and have such refreshment as you desire. I will talk with you again later, but to-night there is the banquet at the house of the Ninii. Ah! it will be the greatest feast that Capua has seen—a banquet to Hannibal and the Carthaginian leaders. Farewell."

He turned to go, but she rose quickly and laid her hand upon his robe.

"You have not heard all, yet," she said, casting down her eyes and speaking in halting phrases. "Do you truly believe that it is *only* a woman's fears that have brought me to Capua? You have not questioned me closely. That is not worthy of your wisdom. It is hard for a woman to tell all things unless they be drawn from her."

He stared with eyes full of wonder.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

Then, throwing her head to one side, she laughed, so that Sergius himself would scarcely have known it from the laugh of the free-hearted, jesting Marcia of other days.

"Oh, my father, you a Capuan and a man learned in the ways of women! It is pitiful — this littleness of your knowledge. Come, tell me now, as to a pedagogue, what is it that leads a woman to all places, through all dangers?"

"Surely, my child, it is love," said Calavius, vacantly. Then his face took on an expression, first of furrowed surprise and then of gratified vanity, an expression that brought the hot blush to Marcia's cheek, even while she struggled to restrain her contemptuous mirth. His manner changed at once to one of insinuating gallantry, which she hastened to check before he should commit himself.

"What is it," she went on again, glancing down that he might not see and read her eyes; "what is it that makes women love men? What, if not strength and courage? I am a Roman, my father; but Roman men are no longer fit mates for Roman women. Where but in the camp of Carthage shall I find one worthy of my beauty? It is there I seek my lover."

Disappointment lowered on the face of Calavius. He had noted her beauty, long before she had referred to it; but now he noted it with a more distinct desire, and the words, "my

father," which she had used, though but a customary term of respect, grated the more harshly upon his ears. Still, controlling himself, he asked : —

"And which man of our allies has the lady Marcia chosen to bless with the love that is too high for an humble Italian?"

She looked the siren herself, as she answered : —

"Surely, my father would not learn the secret of his daughter!" Calavius winced. "Believe, only, that he who has been loved at a distance is noble and powerful. However, if so be that my lord would learn the truth, let him take her to this banquet. I have heard often that much liberty is allowed to the women of Capua; why not, then, to the guest of the noblest of the Capuans?"

The mind of Calavius had been divided. With the first rebuff to his rising passion had come the impulse to avail himself of his power and of the helpless position of his guest to gratify his spite or his pleasure as she might choose to make it. Then, at the suggestion that she loved and had come to seek a Carthaginian of rank, he thought of the disfavour — even peril he might incur by such a course should an enemy or a slave learn the facts and

expose him ; and, finally, he fell into a cunning casting up of the influence he might gain over the lover, whoever he was, to whom he should be instrumental in surrendering such perfect beauty. Again he winced at the thought, but then, what more likely than that her silly, woman's vanity aspired to the captain-general himself ? and he, Pacuvius Calavius, might hope to be the confidential go-between. What profit and influence might not be found in such a relation !—so personal, so beneficent ! After all, there were many beautiful women—even among his slaves, and what was the difference between woman and woman compared to the dream of Italian sovereignty that hovered before his eyes ! He knew well that no wife or daughter of a Capuan would be present at that banquet—only the most beautiful of the city's hetairai—but what of that ? This girl was a Roman—an enemy ; the claims of hospitality between his people and hers would be shivered in the coming crash of arms. What mattered it if to gain a point—a great point—he wrenched loose his personal obligations a few days sooner ? Yes, Marcia should go to the banquet, and, if Hannibal desired her, then he, Pacuvius Calavius, would surrender her into his arms. He knit his brows and spoke :—

“What you ask, my daughter, is truly difficult to compass, nor do I know that any women or of what class will be present. Trust, however, that all my power shall be at your service to gain any wish of your heart,—and, as you know, I am not powerless,—only remember that it is your will that I am doing. I will send a servant who shall lead you to your chamber. Rest, prepare, and expect my return before the third hour. Farewell.”

Marcia did not detain him. She noticed the wealth of odours that his fluttering gown had left behind, and her contempt and disgust deepened.

IV.

THE HOUSE OF THE NINII CELERES.

THE rustle of garments aroused Marcia from a sleep wherein had been more of bitter revery than of rest ; and, glancing up, she saw, at the entrance of her apartment, two girls, evidently slaves. They had knelt, with arms crossed upon their breasts and downcast eyes.

“ Will my mistress be pleased to place herself in the hands of her servants, that she may receive refreshment and whatsoever she desires? ”

The girl's voice was soft and musical. Marcia rose, and, with a slight inclination of the head, indicated her acquiescence ; then she followed her new guides through new halls and rooms, around and through the colonnade, to a part of the house beyond the garden. Here were the apartments of the bath, and, under the skilful hands of her attendants, she felt the fatigue and blights of the journey passing from her. No such artists of luxury were known at Rome as were these slave women of Capua ; new refinements were revealed at every step —

refinements that seemed to culminate when the hair-dresser began her work. First came the anointing with the richest odours deftly combined from a dozen vials of ivory or fine glass; then the crimping and curling with hot irons, the touch of which served also, as the attendant explained, to consume whatever coarseness clung to the perfumes and to bring out their finest and most delicate effects. Meanwhile the Roman simplicity of Marcia's wardrobe and jewel-case had been thoroughly explored, not without some scornful side glances on the part of the Capuan women, and she who was in charge of the tiring announced their contents to be quite inadequate to dress a lady for a banquet of state—an announcement which brought more smiles than blushes to Marcia's face. Still, despite her half-veiled contempt, there was nothing to do but resign herself absolutely into the hands of such competent authorities, and, besides, she could not say that she found the process altogether displeasing.

The elaborate structure of curls and frizzes had now been confined in place by a net of fine gold thread, in which were set, at regular intervals, pearls remarkable for their colour and perfect spherical form; then a dozen long pins with carved gold heads were passed through

the net, and above and around all was bound a diadem of thin-beaten gold ornamented with intricate open-work tracery. Finally, the hair-dresser, having bade Marcia behold herself in the polished silver mirror which she held up, retired with an expression of serene self-approbation upon her face, and gave way to other attendants.

One of these bound the smallest of jewelled sandals upon feet that were too small, even for them; another produced a long palla or sleeveless tunic of apple tint ornamented with feather patterns, and fastened it with amethyst brooches at the shoulders. Last, the head tirewoman herself came to perform what was, after the hair-dressing, the most delicate of all these operations—the adjustment of the cyclas or over-robe, a garment of the finest texture and of a shade known as wax-colour, through which the tint and ornamentation of the palla produced an effect of inimitable beauty. A slender, vine-work design, embroidered in gold, bordered the cyclas, and it was in arranging so that the course of this would form harmonious lines, wherein the skill and difficulty of the task mainly lay.

A final appeal to the mirror followed, and then, with Marcia's approval, the work was

over. She was robed, indeed, for a Capuan banquet, and in a manner her simple Roman taste had never dreamed of.

As yet Calavius had not returned. She sat in the portico of the garden, awaiting him, and time was now afforded her to think of her plans, the risk she ran, and the objects to be gained. Not since the resolve had first found place in her mind had she wavered and feared as now, and an intolerable repugnance began to possess her.

Darkness had veiled the city for several hours, but it was the darkness of a southern night and of a city in festal mood. The stars seemed to stand out from the blue-gray vault above, as if reaching down to the earth—whether in pity or anger, she could not tell. Around the city itself hung the luminous aura of its lights; the cries of revellers sounded from the neighbouring streets,—even the rush of feet,—while, to the eastward, the glow of the Carthaginian watch-fires seemed to reach upward to meet the rays of the stars. Yes, these were hostile to the invaders! She knew it now. They were the glittering points of Roman pilæ descending upon the foe—pilæ driven by the hands that mouldered amid the red mire of Cannæ. Surely *those* men approved of what

she was about to do! Was not Sergius among them, and would he not will her to make good, by her beauty, what the sacrifice of his own strength had failed to accomplish? What interest had he, now, in her as a woman, as a mistress, as a wife? Greater thoughts must inspire the shade that was once her lover: their common city, its life and power, the destiny of the world that depended upon the preservation of both of these; and still she could not banish the feeling of doubt, of disapproval. Perhaps Calavius would not return, or perhaps he might not be able to gain for her permission to attend the banquet?

A commotion at the street entrance, the sound of approaching footsteps, and the rustle of a gown seemed about to answer her question. The next moment, her host stood before her and surveyed with astonished approval the appearance she presented.

"You are very beautiful," he said slowly and as if thinking with regret that he was surrendering such perfection for mere influence and power. "I have spoken of you and your wish, and Stenius and Pacuvius—the Ninii Celeres—consent to your presence. The litters await us in the vestibule, and it is time that we set out."

Marcia rose, and he led her back through the halls and courts.

"Who will be there?" she asked, as they approached the street door.

"All of especial note, except Vibius Virrius and Marius Blossius. They are away, busied about matters of state. Mago also has just departed on a mission to Carthage. There will be no Campanians save our hosts, myself, my son, Perolla, and Jubellius Taurea, the bravest of our horsemen. Of our good allies, you shall see Hasdrubal, Maharbal, Hannibal-the-Fighter, Silenus the Sicilian, who is to write the history of the wars, Iddilcar the priest of Melkarth, and the great captain-general himself—"

"Come, let us hasten," said Marcia, quickly, as if fearful lest her resolution might forsake her while there was yet chance to withdraw.

A moment later and Calavius had assisted her into a gorgeously caparisoned litter. She hardly noticed the rabble that thronged round the door as she passed out, and whom the slaves of her host seemed to keep back with difficulty. Still, she was conscious of nudgings, looks, and gestures that made her blush, though the words that accompanied them were unintelligible. Calavius was furious, and paused, as if to give orders for harsher repression. Then

a voice called out in coarse jargon — half Latin, half Campanian: —

“She is pretty, my Pacuvius! Venus grant her to restore your youth!”

With an effort, he twisted his features into a smile.

“May the gods favour your wish, my friend!” he said. Then, plunging into his litter, he clapped his hands, for the bearers to proceed, and, lying back among the cushions, ground his teeth in rage.

“Ah! I must play to them — now. Later I shall remember and know how to avenge. The lump of filth! Who knows, though, but that he spoke wisdom? Perhaps I am truly giving up the hope of my youth to others.”

Meanwhile the bearers were running swiftly through the streets; that is, as swiftly as the crowds and their condition and humour permitted. Torches gleamed everywhere, and, from time to time as the curtains parted slightly, Marcia caught glimpses of the scene. The city had abandoned itself to the wildest debauchery — a debauchery that had about it more of the desire to drown unpleasant thoughts and haunting fears than of spontaneous exultation or mirth; and their drunkenness seemed but a garment thrown over the head to shut

out the approaching spectre of Roman retribution. All Capua presented to her the spectacular results of a turbulent democracy exalted to power; for the vagaries of the Roman plebeians seemed as nothing beside the unbridled insolence of this populace. Here was Pacuvius Calavius, who had triumphed by their aid over a senate more than half in sympathy with Rome; and now, recognizing his litter, they thronged around it, calling out familiar greetings, or even sheer vulgarities, pulling the curtains aside, kissing their hands to him, and, from time to time, compelling his bearers to pause while they slobbered drunken kisses upon his garments and person. No sign of true respect greeted their leader; it seemed as if the mob recognized him only as the creature of its whim, to be upheld as a facile puppet or cast down by the first savage gust of discontent.

As for Calavius himself, he, too, fell readily into the part assigned him. His face was wreathed in a constant smile, his lips spoke only compliments, his hands waved greetings, until, at last, Marcia lay back, and, closing her eyes, refused to see more of her host's degradation.

Suddenly the litter bearers paused and set down their burdens. In distance the journey

had been short, but the many enforced halts had made it seem as if the whole city had been traversed. They were now before the porch of a house that was, if possible, even more magnificent than that of Calavius. Every column was twined with garlands, flowers hung in festoons from the architrave, incense steamed up from brazen tripods set on either side of the entrance. In front and around the entire insula, the streets were packed dense with a seething crowd, save only for a small space before the vestibule, where was stationed a guard of Africans equipped in the manner of Roman legionaries. These were rude, wiry soldiers, scornful of civilians and their fancied rights, but, above all, contemptuous of the soft Campanian mob that arrogated so much and could command so little. At first the populace had tried to browbeat and play with them, and the soldiers had sallied out into the street and killed a couple of the most talkative, wounding half a dozen more. Now the cowardly Capuans stood back in awe, giving passage whenever the strangers called for it, and hardly daring to whisper among themselves as to what manner of rule they had invited to destroy them. Were it not for this summary treatment it is doubtful whether any of the guests would have been able

to gain the entrance — least of all Calavius, who was looked upon as their peculiar creation and mouthpiece, and at whom a hundred complaints were volleyed (in low voices, be it said) as he made his slow way through the press.

Glad to escape at last from a position at once embarrassing and dangerous, he now made haste to escort Marcia between the files of foreign guards, into the atrium, where the Ninii Celeres — smiling hosts — had stationed themselves to receive the guests that had been bidden to so important a festivity. Thence he led her, muffled as she was, to a vestiarius opening to the left side, where were already some half-dozen women, whose attendants were adding the finishing graces to toilets disarranged in the litters. One of these latter was assigned to Marcia's aid, but a few touches to her hair and a slight readjustment of the cyclas were all that was needed.

Meanwhile, the Roman was watching, with deep interest, the group in the court of the atrium. She had taken a position from which she could have an unobstructed view through the doorway, and her attendant had evidently informed herself as to the identity of the strangers, and was anxious to win approval by communicating her knowledge.

“That is he, most beautiful lady; the one with the long, white tunic, at the right of my masters. Is he not poorly dressed for so great a man? Who would imagine him of any consequence at all?”

While the girl spoke, Marcia was regarding earnestly, and for the first time, the chief of Carthage, the conqueror of Trebia and Trasimenus and Cannæ—of Sempronius and Flaminius and Varro. She saw a man slightly above the middle height, well built, with strong, aquiline features and thick, black, curling beard and hair, though the latter was worn away at the temples by constant pressure of the helmet. It was a face that combined deep thought, immeasurable pride, and absolute self-poise and inscrutability—a face that would have been handsome but for the disfiguring effect of the eye lost in the marshes of the Arnus. Perhaps it was this that lent it something of its prevailing expression of sadness; perhaps it was a realization of responsibilities met and to be met and a premonition of the inevitable end. His dress was, as the maid had so scornfully commented, plain in the extreme—a striking contrast to the celebrated magnificence of his armour and military equipment. Now, a simple, white, tunic-like garment, relieved by a narrow border of

gold, descended to his feet, while a slender gold fillet was his sole ornament in addition to the seal finger-ring and heavy earrings, which he wore in common with his companions.

The latter formed a group hardly less interesting than their leader, and the girl pointed them out, one by one, and made her approving or slurring comments. There was Hasdrubal, coarse-featured, middle-sized, and corpulent, whose garments gleamed with purple and gold, and whose ears, fingers, and neck glittered with a profusion of jewels. Him Marcia's informant evidently regarded with admiration approaching to awe, although his skill as manager of the commissariat, and his exploits as a soldier when occasion demanded, were probably unknown to her.

Maharbal, slight and agile, with plain, dark robe and few jewels, with hair dressed high, diadem of plumes, and beard worn forked in the Numidian fashion, attracted but passing comment. He was doubtless a savage from the desert and of little wealth. Another of the generals, however, seemed to arouse more positive sentiments: a giant in size, with scarlet tunic, and loaded with gold chains and rings and gems, his dark, ferocious face towered above the heads of his companions. The

woman's voice sank to a whisper as she said:—

“That is the one they call Hannibal-the-Fighter. They say he never spares an enemy, and that he eats the flesh of those he kills. May the gods grant that my masters shall wean him to-night from the love of such hideous, barbaric fare!”—and yet, with all her horror, Marcia almost smiled to note how the girl looked upon this brute with more of woman's feeling for man than she bestowed upon any of his better favoured and more famous compatriots.

From these four the Roman's eyes wandered to a fifth Carthaginian, who seemed to complete the tale of guests of that nationality. Her informant had passed him by in silence, and had gone on to point out Jubellius Taurea, Pacuvius Calavius, and his son, Perolla—the only Campanians present besides the hosts of the occasion. When the category was completed, however, she called the maid's attention to the omission.

“He?” said the latter, lightly; “the man in the violet tunic? He is nothing—a priest of one of their gods whom they call Melkarth.”

He was a tall, gaunt man, and he stood directly behind Hannibal, and kept his eyes

fixed upon the pavement, as if studying the intricacies of its mosaic pattern.

Silenus, the Greek rhetor, made the last of the group.

And now, at a signal from the hosts, the company turned and followed them in single file toward the rear of the house.

"They will send for you when they have reclined," said the attendant, in answer to a glance of inquiry from Marcia; and, a moment later, the summons came.

Walls, floors, ceilings, every part of the house through which they passed, seemed covered with roses clustered, festooned, and superlaid. Suddenly they found themselves at the entrance of the great banquet hall, where two triclinia were set facing each other, with room for the servants to pass between and minister to the wants of the feasters.

At the table to the east—that of honour—reclined Stenius Ninius, in the middle place of the middle couch, with Hannibal himself at his right, the place of honour above all. Marcia was led to the head of the lowest couch, next to the Carthaginian leader, where she found Pacuvius Calavius reclining below her, as the phrase went; while on the couch directly opposite lay the priest of Melkarth in the lowest

place, and Perolla in the highest. The other places, below Pacuvius, between Stenius and the priest, and between the priest and Perolla, were assigned to the women, while the other table, over which Pacuvius Ninus presided, was arranged in similar fashion.

V.

THE BANQUET.

MARCIA had felt an instinctive shrinking when she saw that the women, also, were to recline, after the manner of the dissolute Greeks, instead of sitting, as she had been taught to consider the only decent posture for a Roman maid or matron. Then the thought of her mission brought the blush surging to her cheeks, whence it receded, leaving them pale with a sterner resolve. Was not love of country the greatest virtue? It was time to school herself, to shrink at nothing in that cause. As she took her place, she noticed that the priest of Melkarth, who lay directly opposite, had been regarding her fixedly.

She could see his face now, and it was not a pleasing one. The Semitic features, fine and noble in their best form, but capable of greater depths of degeneration than those of any other type, were in his case exaggerated to an extreme degree of coarseness. The mouth was large and badly formed, the forehead low, the small

eyes peered out snakelike from under heavy, puffy lids. The nose alone was cut with any measure of fineness, and that projected, wide-nostrilled, and aquiline as the beak of a bird of prey. It would have been difficult to imagine a face more gross and sensual in its lines, and the look of low admiration and eagerness which it now wore, was well calculated to bring out the sensuality in its most repulsive form. Marcia felt her cheeks burning under the fixedness of the man's gaze, and, looking down, she struggled to compose herself by a close study of the gorgeous coverlid of the couch, — a fine Campanian texture, dyed scarlet, and heavily embroidered with figures of birds and beasts and flowers, worked into an elaborate design.

Even then, his eyes seemed to burn through her hair, through her brain, down into her heart, and she found her will revolting more violently than ever against the possibilities involved in her mission.

The voice of Hannibal, addressing some conventional compliment to Stenius upon the perfection of the arrangements, came as an intense relief, for the others all turned toward the speaker, and, a moment later, the slaves passed around with silver basins and ewers, pouring scented water upon the hands of the guests and

drying them with dainty flickings of filmy napkins. Vessels of gold and silver and fine earthenware burdened the tables, while at each end of the garden stood a butler in charge of several large amphoræ. Those at the north end were half buried amid imitation mountains, peaked with real snow wherewith the wine was to be cooled, while those at the south were surrounded by more than tropical verdure, with the braziers and vessels of hot water beside them, ready for mixing the warm draughts.

And now the slaves hurried hither and thither, bearing costly dishes with elaborately dressed viands: dormice strewed with honey and poppy seeds; beccaficoes surrounded by yolks of eggs, seasoned with pepper and made to resemble peafowls' eggs in a nest whereon the stuffed bird was sitting; fish floating in rich gravies that spouted from the mouths of four tritons at the corners of the dish; crammed fowls, hares fitted with wings to resemble Pegasus, thrushes in pastry stuffed with raisins and nuts, oysters, scallops, snails on silver grid-irons, boar stuffed with fieldfares, with baskets of figs and dates hanging from his tusks, sweet-meats, cold tarts with Spanish honey — these and a hundred other dishes, strange or costly, followed each other in quick succession, and,

all the while, the carvers flourished their knives in time with music, now of instruments, again of choruses of boys and girls. The butlers, too, had not been idle, and the cups were constantly replenished, first with the warm and, later, with the cold mixtures.

Yet, though both men and women ate greedily and drank deeply, a gloom seemed to hang over the feast. The Carthaginians, whether influenced by native dignity or by a real or simulated contempt for their hosts, were reserved and silent, while the Capuans seemed, at one moment, forcing themselves into strained merriment, and, at another, cowering before the cold eyes that watched their efforts with scarcely veiled indifference. With fear on the one side and distrust upon the other, the chances for hilarity and good fellowship looked scanty enough, and yet Stenius Ninius was too much a man of the world to yield readily to untoward social conditions.

Clapping his hands, he cried out, as the head butler bowed before him:—

“Now, my good Cappadox, let us have no more of these native vintages. Good though they were, they but serve to cultivate the taste for the wines that cement friendships such as ours. Henceforth pour for us only the Coan,

Leucadian, and Thasian, and see that you select those amphoræ whose contents are toothless with age."

A rough laugh rolled up from the other table, and the voice of Hannibal-the-Fighter broke out with:—

"It is well said, host. Truly I was wondering if we had been drinking from the famous cellars of Capua. We washed our horses with better wine in the north."

Stenius flushed. Then he smiled.

"And, Cappadox," he went on, in an unruffled voice, "do you send what remains in my cellar of the vintages we have been drinking, to the horse of my worthy guest."

At the giant's discourteous words, Hannibal himself had started from the mood of thought in which he had seemed well-nigh buried. A quick glance shot from his eye, and his brow furrowed. Then the courtly answer of Stenius relieved the situation, and he turned to his host.

"You must pardon rough words to rough soldiers, my friend. We of Carthage have had but slender chances to avail ourselves of Greek culture and urbanity. We are mere merchants and warriors — not men of letters or of social manners."

The hulking savage grew purple and trembled under the rebuke of his chief. Twice he essayed to speak and then discreetly gulped down the words, for Hannibal's face, though calm and courtly, showed a hardening of its lines which meant much to those who knew him.

As for the Campanian, he raised his hands in voluble deprecation of the apology.

Did *he* not realize that but for soldiers and merchants, letters and social manners would never have come into being? It was the privilege of so brave a warrior as Hannibal-the-Fighter to say what he pleased, and when and where. Ordinary rules were only for little men. Besides, the best of Campanian wines were truly all too poor for heroes whose souls were already attasted to the nectar of the gods.

The suppressed fury and shame of the offender melted away under the balm of these honeyed words, and, laughing loudly but with some constraint, he tossed off to his host a cup of the wine last brought.

And now Hannibal seemed to shake himself loose from the bonds of silence and thought, though his conversation still showed the trend of his mind. He turned to Calavius.

"Thirty thousand foot and four thousand

horse form an excellent array, and yet I should imagine that the second city in Italy could do even better — in case of need."

The attention of hosts and guests became tense at once, though Marcia could note that the motives were diverse.

Calavius seemed nervous and flustered.

"There was a time when that was undoubtedly so, my Lord," he said hastily; "but, now, many of our young men have fallen in the wars, and many are serving with the enemy, unable to escape and doubtless in serious danger —"

"Three hundred horsemen," interrupted Hannibal, dryly, "and my spies inform me that they are likely to continue serving Rome — by choice, as would doubtless many of your well-born at home — like this fellow, Magius," and his brow darkened ominously.

The Campanians moved uneasily on the couches.

"Magius is a traitor and will be dealt with in due season," said Stenius. "It is friends and festivities first with us, and enemies and punishments later."

"Yes, Magius shall be dealt with," echoed Hannibal; but the acquiescence brought no relief to his hearers. Why should he feel it necessary to supplement their assurance so sig-

nificantly? Did not the treaty between Carthage and Capua provide that Capuan laws and magistrates should still govern all Capuans? Why should he speak so markedly of their military power? Did not the treaty expressly state that no Capuan was to be called upon for military duty except by his own rulers?

Calavius had been signalling vigorously to his son, Perolla, who had reclined silent and gloomy, but who now seemed about to speak. Disregarding his father's warning, the young man broke in:—

“It is idle to deny that the Campanian horse serve willingly with Rome and will continue so to serve. As for Decius Magius, there are many good men here who hold with him, but who lack his boldness.”

For an instant every one held his breath in terror of the coming outburst, but those whose angry or frightened eyes first ventured to glance toward the captain-general saw his face wreathed in smiles, and his wine cup raised toward the daring speaker.

“Happiness to you, flower of Campanian youth! and know that there are two things that Hannibal prizes most among men: a friend who was once an enemy, and a friend who dares to speak the truth.”

Calavius had recovered his composure during this speech.

"I would not have you imagine, my Lord," he began, "but that my son speaks as he believes and in order that you may have full information; yet, he is ill to-day in body and mind, and, even were it not so, I am older than he and know more of men. That Decius Magius has sympathizers, it is vain to deny; but that they are many or influential, I, who know the Capuans, aver is not the case. As for our horsemen, it is easy to see that their safety demands an apparent friendship for Rome. It is not wise for three hundred to revile thirty thousand."

Hannibal had continued to keep his gaze upon Perolla, scarcely listening to his father's words. In the young man's face something of surprise had mingled with his half-defiant, half-moody expression.

"I do not ask of you, my son," pursued the general, "that you whose heart was but lately with our enemies, should love and trust us at once. That were the part of a hypocrite, and I honour you, both for the filial piety that threw down your preference before your father's will, and for the slowness with which your heart follows your act. Grant me but this: that you

judge us fairly by our deeds, and if we prove not better friends than Rome, return to them in peace and safety. Meanwhile there is a horse with crimson mane and feet that shall be led from my stable to yours in the morning. Ride him, and remember that Hannibal honours courage, filial obedience, and truth—all in like measure."

Subdued applause from both tables followed these words, but the face of Perolla lost but little of its stubborn hostility. Hannibal turned away, and Calavius and Ninius sought to cover by eager talking the young man's ungracious reception of such signal favour. The faces of the Carthaginians remained for the most part impassive; only their dark eyes seemed to sparkle, either with wine or suppressed passion. Marcia still felt that one pair was trying to look through her, and she was conscious that Silenus, the Sicilian Greek, was making eager and indecorous love to one of the women at the other table. Another of the latter had just ventured on some light badinage with the chief guest, in whose face smiles had chased away all the abstraction of the earlier hours. He answered her as lightly, but with indifference, and turned to Marcia.

"And what says our Roman beauty?" he

asked. "She has come boldly and far to see her enemies. Who knows but she has a boon to beg."

Again Marcia noted disturbance under Calavius' smile. He was wondering at the general's knowledge. Then he realized that Mago's report must be its basis, and his face cleared.

"Yes, truly, I *have* a boon to ask," replied Marcia, fixing her great eyes upon the bearded front, stern through its smiles. "It is that you will spare one house in Italy from ravage and destruction."

"And where may this house be?" he asked in bantering tones. "We shall leave many standing, but this one most surely of all."

"It is upon the brow of the Palatine Hill —" she began, and then a burst of applause gave notice that the compliment had struck home. "It is my father's," she concluded, blushing.

Calavius was in ecstasy over the graceful tact of his protégé. No Capuan or Greek could have done better. Hannibal eyed her with a curious expression, half admiring, half doubtful.

"I grant the boon — freely," he said. Then, fixing her with his gaze, he went on, "And when will you claim it?"

"The son of Hamilcar knows best," replied

Marcia, casting down her eyes, and again she felt the approval of her host and his friends.

That Hannibal was pleased and flattered was evident, and yet there was a certain reserve in his manner. Possibly he suspected that she wished to provoke an announcement of his plans; perhaps an even deeper insight led him near to a fuller conception of her purpose.

"Yes, it is truly for us to say," he said loudly, glancing around the board; then, turning quickly to Marcia: "I understand that you counselled delay until spring to my brother, Mago. Why?"

So frank a question, so different from all that had been told of the more than Oriental craft of the Carthaginians, and one that went so straight to the motive of her presence, threw Marcia into some confusion. Calavius noticed it, and, fearing lest she might say something to do away with the impression of her former tact, he came to the rescue.

"Surely we shall not insult my Lord Bacchus by a council of war in his presence?" but Hannibal waved his hand toward him and looked fixedly at Marcia.

"Goddesses may speak on all subjects, at all times; and the gods smile."

"That my words," she began, with eyes still

cast down, "were deemed worthy to be borne to my Lord, is too much honour. That he should deem them worthy of thought, is beyond the dream of mere woman." Then, glancing up and smiling wistfully into his face, she went on: "Know, that whatever of judgment born of knowledge of the place and the men has come to me, a girl,—that and more is for the service of the great general of Carthage,—the benignant liberator of Italy."

"Why do you advise delay?" asked Hannibal again, and the eyes of Maharbal glittered, as he leaned over from the other table. "There are those who say I have delayed too long already."

"For this," replied Marcia, boldly; "that you may save your soldiers and your allies; that they may lie in rest and luxury, and that, ere springtime, the cities of the Latin Name, yes, truly, and the very rabble of Rome, shall come to you on their knees for leave to bear the horseheads along the Sacred Way, up the Capitoline slope —"

"If in the spring, why not now?"

Maharbal and Hannibal-the-Fighter made a clucking sound of assent; Hasdrubal and the other guests seemed indifferent, but the Capuans were hanging on Marcia's words.

"Because the time is not ripe—" she began.

"Words!" cried her questioner, cutting off her speech; "I asked, *why?*"

Frightened at his vehemence, but put to it of necessity, she answered:—

"Because there are strifes and bickerings—at Rome—throughout the Latin Name—that must soon bear fruit of civil strife. The nobles grind and hold to their privileges; the commons serve and starve and look to Carthage for aid. How shall these things grow better, while you hold the garden of Italy—while the Greeks of the south and the Samnites and the men of the soil gather behind you on one side, and the Gauls and Etruscans muster in the north? The water is eating at the mole; soon the waves will lash up and sweep it from its foundations."

Hannibal eyed her closely for a moment. Then he said: "There are those at Rome and among the Latin Name who tell me otherwise. They are good men, and they know. Perhaps I have been even too cautious. You are young and beautiful. Hold fast to matters suited to youth and beauty, and leave the conduct of wars and statecraft to men." Turning to Stenius, he went on, "If this Leucadian wine of yours, my Stenius, were let into the veins

of those who lie dead at Cannæ, they would be fit to rise and do battle again."

Stenius bowed and smiled; Marcia grew red and then pale with shame and vexation, seeing how her plots were like to fall and crush her; but, at this moment, the voice of Hannibal-the-Fighter rose from the other table. Flushed with wine, he was boasting of his slain. "Four at Trèbia," he cried out, "seven at Trasimenus, eighteen at Cannæ — but all men. It is better to slay the wolves' whelps, if only to teach women that it is no longer wise to bring forth Romans. I — I who speak have already killed eleven boys — ah! but you must wait till we enter Rome. Then will be the day when they shall build new cities in Hades!"

The Carthaginians heard him with indifference; the Capuans, all save Perolla, applauded nervously; and Marcia grew sick at heart and mad with a rage that could almost have strangled the giant as he reclined.

"And now," began Ninius, mildly, when there was a moment's silence, "that we may the better enjoy what is to come, there are baths and attendants; and the red feather will make way for new feastings at the end of two hours."

Slaves had run in to assist the diners from their couches; the Capuans, with dreams of

relief, refreshment, and re-repletion; the Carthaginians, bored, but striving to be polite and to follow the customs of their entertainers. Even Hannibal, while his smile was half a frown, permitted himself to be led away.

Filled with disgust and despair, Marcia felt herself all unfit to begin a new revel—one that was to be made possible by loathsome practices, as yet unknown at Rome, and which bade fair to end in aimless and hideous debauchery. The women were but warming to their part, when the summons of Stenius Ninius had proclaimed a truce with Bacchus and Venus—a truce with promise of more deadly battle to be joined. She had seen glances hot with wine and lust, claspings of hands, loosened cyclas, and more lascivious reclinings. The gloomy Perolla had yielded a little to the soft influences, and even Hannibal seemed to force himself to toying, if only in the name of courtesy; while, through it all, and more and more as the light of day advanced, Marcia felt the eyes of Iddilcar, priest of Melkarth, burning into her soul. He at least gave no heed to nearer blandishments, and terror and loathing filled her in equal measure.

A faintness—a sudden weakness born of her recent journey—served for excuse, which

Calavius seemed not unwilling to voice, and, surrounded by a guard of slaves, her litter bore her back to his house, through streets littered with drunken men and fluctuant with the figured robes of courtesans.

VI.

ALLIES.

NIGHT had come again, before Marcia could arouse herself from the deep sleep with which exhaustion of mind and body had overwhelmed her. She remembered the scenes of the banquet as the phantasms of a dream — strange and terrible; for her thoughts were slow to gather the threads and weave the woof. Only a feeling of failure, of fruitless abasement, was ever present. Hannibal had admired her, but, proof against any controlling attraction, he had put her words aside with little short of contempt. A dread, even, lest the strange acumen of this wonderful man had pierced her mask, and that her very motive and mission were already suspected, was not lacking to add dismay to discouragement. Such thoughts were but wretched company, and they brought with them a vague conception of her own vain egotism in imagining the possibility of other outcome. She tried to sleep again, but could not. What mattered it, though, by some shifting of

hours, her day had become night and her night day! She must arise and talk with some one, if it were only the host whom she so heartily despised.

Attendants entered at her summons, and the refreshment of the bath and the labour of the toilet were once more passed through. Then, dismissing the slaves, she walked out alone into the garden and sat down on a softly cushioned seat of carved marble. A fountain plashed soothingly in the foliage near by, the stars were shining again, while, from without, the jarring sounds of the city came to her ears.

How long she sat, awake yet thinking of nothing, dull and dazed, she could not tell. Then she was aroused by a sandalled step upon the pavement. A man was standing before her, whose face, despite its youthful contours, was deep-lined and melancholy. He was short of stature and slenderly though gracefully built, and his black curls clustered over brow and eyes that seemed rather those of a poet or a dreamer than of a man of action. In the sombre, dark-blue garments of mourning, without ornaments or jewels, so different from the gay banqueting robes in which she had last seen him, Marcia gazed a moment, before she recognized Perolla, the son of Pacuvius.

"You are not pretty to-night, Scylla," he said tauntingly, "though you left us early. There are dark circles under the eyes that looked kindly at the enemy of your country."

Marcia flushed crimson, and he went on: "Yes; I watched you smiling and ogling, but it will take greater traitors than you to snare him. He is like Minos, in that he did not reach out to take from your hands the purple lock shorn from your father's head: he is not like him otherwise: he is not just, and he will not give honourable terms."

"You, at least, are faithful to Rome?" said Marcia, slowly, and ignoring his insults.

"Can you ask?" he answered; "is it that you wish to betray me? Well, then, know truly that I have betrayed myself to your heart's content. Do you not see the mourning garments I wear for my city's faithlessness and for her coming ruin? Have you not heard how my father dragged me from the side of Decius Magius in the market place that I might attend the banquet?—ah! but you have not heard how I had planned to startle them all."

Marcia began to wonder whether she was talking with a madman.

"Shall I tell?"

She made a sign of assent.

"It was toward evening—they have but just risen from the tables now. Then, it was to seek the red feathers for the third time; but I led my father back among the rose bushes and showed him a sword which I had girt to my side, beneath my tunic. 'This,' said I, 'shall win us pardon from Rome. Look you, when we return, I will plunge it into the Carthaginian's breast.'"

Marcia bent forward eagerly.

"And then," he went on, "my father bound my arms to my sides, with his own around me, and wept and talked of our recent pledges to these foreigners. 'Can they outweigh our ancient pledges to Rome?' I answered. So he pleaded how the attendants would surely cut me down, and mentioned Hannibal's look, which he affirmed I would not be able to confront; but I laughed and made little of these things. Then he spoke of the hospitable board, which I admitted had something of reason; and, finally, when he had declared that the sword must reach Hannibal only through his own breast, then, at last, from filial duty, mark you, I threw the weapon from me, telling him that he had betrayed his country thrice: in revolting from Rome, in allying with foreigners, and, now, in turning aside the instrument of

escape. Then we returned to the banquet, but my father trembled, and ate and drank no more. There, now, is a story to tell your city's destroyer. If you betray me, perhaps he may yet love you."

Marcia viewed him sternly.

"Truly your father was right, when he said you were ill in mind."

"Yes, ill in mind and in heart."

"How, then, do you not recognize one whose heart is sicker than your own?"

Perolla looked at her inquiringly, and she went on:—

"You have a city that has been false to itself, and is in danger of punishment—a father, too, if you will. *My* city has already suffered every evil but destruction: my brother and he to whom Juno was about to lead me have been killed by these pulse-eaters. Are such things the benefits that go to make friendship and love for the slayers? Say, rather, hate and the craving for revenge."

"Yes," said Perolla, moodily; "they are indeed evils, but less than mine, in that they are passed—"

"And is Rome safe, do you think?" she asked quickly.

"Rome will conquer," he said doggedly,

"unless there be many more traitors like you."

"Fool!" she cried, grasping his wrist. "Can you not see — you who claim to be a philosopher and to have Greek blood? — you, at least, should have understood my words."

He gazed at her vacantly, and she began to regret her vehemence. It came to her mind that this was not altogether a safe man to trust with her secret. Faithful he was, no doubt; but a fool might be even more dangerous than a traitor. Still, she had said too much to be silent, and she felt the need of some ally to whom she could talk — upon whom she could at least pretend to lean when the weight of her burden was heaviest.

"I have told you what I have lost — what I dread to lose. Now learn what I am here to gain. For many days after the black news of Cannæ, I heard them talking in my father's house — talking of the advance of the insolent victors and of the paltry defence we could oppose, the certain destruction that awaited us. Still they were brave — old men and boys. The soldiers were dead, but we set to work training new — shaping them alike out of youth and age and bondmen; and the slayers of our citizens delayed, and we gained strength and

courage. In every temple of the twelve gods it was the same prayer by day and night: 'Grant us delay. Grant us that the winter may find him in the south!' At last came the news that he was advancing to Capua, and rumours of a Carthaginian party in the city. From Capua, seized with all its engines of war, was but a few days to Rome. Then I took a resolve and made a vow: tell me, am I beautiful?"

"Beautiful as Venus."

"Know, then, that I have dedicated this beauty to her, that she may guard Rome and avenge me upon Rome's enemies."

He shook his head stupidly.

"Minerva does not favour me, lady," he replied; "for I do not understand your words."

"Listen!" she went on, with the earnestness of desperation. "He shall *love* me—he or one who can sway him—and they shall play the laggards here, until the winter gives us time—and time brings safety."

He understood her now, but still he shook his head.

"If you speak truth," he said slowly, "you speak foolishness as well. Hannibal will love no mistress but Carthage, and there is no man living who shall sway him by a hair's breadth. *Now* I see why you spoke to him of plots at

Rome and of the wisdom of delay. Ah! a woman to make game of *him!*" and he threw back his head and laughed. "Do you imagine he has not divined your plot? Give him your beauty if you will. He will take it, doubtless, if he have time, and march north forthwith, after you have confessed your little plottings beneath the hot tweezers. Only one thing shall stay him — steel, — and in the hands of man — not blandishments in the mouth of a girl."

Marcia was in despair.

"And is there no help," she cried, "for me, a Roman woman, from you, a friend of Rome? Surely we shall be stronger together, even if our plots are different. Two plans are better than one."

Before he could frame his answer they heard footsteps coming toward them, and then a man, enveloped in the brown cloak of a slave, pushed aside the foliage and glided out into the moonlight. Perolla, wheeling about, had half drawn his sword, while Marcia shrunk back into the shadow.

"Put up your sword, my Perolla," said the newcomer, speaking in low tones and throwing aside his mantle.

"Decius Magius, by all the gods!" cried the young man; "but why are you disguised?"

"Because, my friend," said Magius, slowly, "Capua is no longer free; because spies of the Carthaginian and of our senate are watching my house, making ready to seize me. Decius Magius can no longer walk in his own city, clad in his own gown, and to-morrow, doubtless, he cannot walk at all. Therefore I wish to speak with you, and I have put on this disguise in order that I might gain your house unobserved, and that your father might not die of fright, learning me to be here."

"But how did you enter? how find me?"

"I entered, my Perolla, because your porter, like every slave in Capua, is drunk to-night, and because the boy whom he left to keep the gate was only enough awake to mumble that you were in the garden."

Perolla frowned. Then, suddenly, he remembered Marcia, concerning whom his suspicions were not yet entirely removed, and he raised his hand in warning.

"There is a woman here — a Roman woman, who tells a strange story," he whispered. "It is better to be discreet."

"The time for discretion is past for Decius Magius," said the other, wearily. "Let him at least speak freely upon his last night of freedom."

Marcia came forward.

"Is it permitted a Roman maid to honour a Campanian who is true to his city's faith?"

"Assuredly, daughter," replied Magius, quietly. She could not see his face except that it was stern and gray-bearded; but, kneeling down beside him, she took his hand and poured out the story of her life, her sorrow, her resolve, and its prosecution. Here, at least, was a man upon whose faith and judgment she could rely, and his manner grew more gentle as she made an end of speaking.

"So you doubted her truth, my Perolla," he said softly. "That is because you have not felt her hand tremble, and because you are too young and too much of a philosopher to judge of the honesty of a woman's face. The same instinct that tells me, doubtless warned Hannibal also that this was not a courtesan, much less an immodest woman well born, and, least of all, a coward who would fly her city, or a traitress who would betray it. You will know more of such things, my Perolla, when you learn to study them less." Then, turning to Marcia, he went on: "What you have designed, my daughter, is noble and worthy of your race—and yet, while I commend, I am slow to encourage. Are you strong to carry your sacrifice to the uttermost?"

Marcia shuddered.

"Yes, if there be need," she said, in a low voice; "I look to no marriage now. Is not the Republic worthy of our best?"

"It is a hard thing," he said, doubtfully, "for a woman well born and modest to belong to a man she hates."

"But it is easy to die, my father, as died Lucretia."

Decius Magius looked at her. Several times his lips moved as if about to speak, and, once, he turned away sharply for a moment, as if to gaze up into the night.

"Tell me, my father," she said earnestly, "do you give me no hope? Is not my beauty worth the purchase of a few paltry months? And then comes the winter, bringing safety."

Still Magius said nothing for several minutes, and when he spoke, it was in harsh, quick tones.

"Yes, it is all possible, as you say it," he said.

"Hannibal to surrender his plans for a woman?" cried Perolla, scornfully. "Surely, my Decius, you jest. Do you not know him—that only the gods can turn him from his purpose?"

Marcia had wheeled about with flashing eyes and faced the last speaker.

"You have shown me the way," she cried. "It is the gods who *shall* delay him."

Perolla gazed at her in astonishment, as at one gone mad, but Magius nodded and frowned.

"It is the best chance," he said slowly, "the only one."

"Still Minerva does not favour me," said Perolla, shaking his head; but Marcia went on in a high, nervous voice and with a gayety that made the older man draw his cloak up to his face in pity:—

"Come, my philosopher, you are indeed stupid to-night. If you did not observe it at the house of the Ninii, you should have heard me just now when I told the story of the banquet to my lord Decius. It is Iddilcar, the priest of Melkarth, who shall bring his god to be my ally—Rome's ally: Iddilcar, who could not so much as take his eyes from me, through all their feasting. There is the man who will prefer my beauty, even to his god's favour; and surely your Hannibal will not wage war against the auspices."

The face of Magius was still shaded by his cloak, and he said nothing; but over the features of the younger man came strange expressions: first amazement, then horror, then a look which

had something of horror but more of yearning. He held out his hands in supplication.

"No — no," he cried. "You shall not do it. You are too beautiful. First I hated you, when I dreamed you to be but a courtesan traitress. Now — now — O gods favour me! Listen! you shall not do it. It is I who will kill him — yes, and you also first," and, turning suddenly away, he staggered. Then, as Magius raised his hand to support him, he shook himself free and ran furiously into the house.

Marcia turned to Magius in astonishment, and he smiled sadly.

"Even philosophers are not proof," he said; "and you are very beautiful — and he is young — and half a Greek." She blushed, and the grim senator took her hand. "May the gods grant, my daughter, that your sacrifice be not for nothing. You have spoken wisdom; but he — he is a madman. As for me, I am as one who is dead. Farewell."

He dropped her hand, and she felt, rather than heard or saw him go; only her voice would not obey her when she strove to detain him, if but for a moment: the only man in Capua whom she could honour — upon whom she could rely. Surely he would not desert her thus? — yes, truly, he was *gone*.

Then she ran several steps in the direction he had taken, and called, though she dared not call his name, until a female attendant came hurrying to answer her.

"My lord, Perolla," said the girl, "had but just rushed out into the street, as if possessed of a daimon. As for a strange slave, she had observed no one; but if such there was, doubtless he had slipped by the porter's boy—who was worthless."

Marcia groped her way to her sleeping apartment, harshly brushing aside an offer of aid. Once alone, she threw herself down upon the couch and burst into a torrent of moans and sobs.

The girl, who had followed hesitatingly, listened in the hallway, nodding her head with conscious satisfaction. "And so the Roman women loved, for all they were said to be so grand and stern. What a fool this one was, though, to prefer the son to the father, who was much richer, and who, being old, would doubtless realize the necessity of being more generous."

And she went back to the slaves' apartments, laughing softly to herself.

VII.

"FREEDOM."

THE morning air of the Seplasia reeked with perfumes, more, even, than was its wont; for Carthaginian and Capuan revellers had been carousing there, and several of the shops had been broken open. The gutters streamed wine with which were mingled all the essences of India and Asia. Flowers, withered and soaked with coarser odours than their own, floated on the pools and drifted down the rivulets. Inert bodies, drunk to repletion, lay scattered about, helpless, unable to drink consciously, but absorbing the wasted liquor through every pore. A dead citizen, his head crushed in by a single blow, sprawled hideously in the middle of the street; while his murderer, a gigantic Gaul, was embracing the corpse with maudlin affection and whispering in its ear to arise and guide him back to camp. Those who passed, from time to time, paused to join the soldier's comrades in laughter and rude jests and suggestions of new methods of awakening his friend.

And now, down the street, extending from wall to wall, came a line of young men, their faces flushed, their garments disordered or cast aside, and their brows crowned with what had once been chaplets of roses. Three or four courtesans, with gowns and tunics torn from their white shoulders, were being dragged along, half laughing, half resisting, and wholly possessed by Bacchic frenzy.

In front of the company marched a slender youth with dark, curling hair and delicate features. In his hand was a thyrsis, and his eyes blazed with the madness of the wine.

"Evoe! evoe!" he shouted. "Comrades! Bacchantes! there is no water in Capua to mix with wine. Equal mixture for poets and fools; undiluted wine for victors and lovers!"

"Perolla is a good Carthaginian to-day," shouted one of his fellows. "Behold how Bacchus has answered our prayers! Kiss him, Cluvia, for a reward."

Pushed forward, the courtesan fell upon the young man's neck, almost bearing him to the street and overwhelming him with drunken caresses. A moment later he freed himself from her arms.

"What is Roman beauty to our Capuan?" he hiccupped. "Marcia — Cluvia — all are

one. All are women, and we are Capuans; braver than Romans, wiser than Carthaginians. Listen, friends! when my father rules Italy, you shall all be kings and queens. Evoe! evoe!"

Shouts and shrieks of drunken joy greeted his words. Several sought to embrace him, and, staggering back, he stumbled over the Gaul and the dead Capuan where they sprawled in the street. Mingled laughter and curses rose all around. Blows and kisses were given and received, and the mad company rolled on through the Seplasia and into the Forum.

Here, too, were intoxication and debauchery, but they were restrained within some manner of bounds. The fact that grave events were taking place, seemed to exert a sobering influence on the populace, and they gathered in a dense throng around the Senate House, whence ominous rumours pursued each other in quick succession.

"The Senate was in session. Hannibal was before them. Decius Magius had been arrested at his demand." So ran the talk.

Guards of Carthaginian soldiery were posted at several points, but especially at all the entrances to the chamber in which the fathers of the city discussed—or obeyed; and against these lines the waves of the rabble surged and

broke and receded. Men offered the soldiers money for free passage or news; women offered them kisses for money; and the soldiers took both and gave nothing but jeers and blows.

Perolla and his drunken company had but just poured out to swell the tide of this ocean of popular passion, when a commotion of a different character began at the other end of the Forum. The closed door of the Senate House swung open, and a man in the garb of a senator, but chained and shackled, issued forth and stood on the steps, beneath the porch. Surrounded by a guard of Africans, it was fully a moment, before the mob recognized Decius Magius, the partisan of Rome. Then a chorus of howls and curses rose up. Insults were hurled, — the grossest that the minds of a licentious rabble could suggest, fists were shaken, women spat toward the prisoner, — even a few stones were cast, and when one of these happened to strike an African of the guard, he turned quietly and cut down the nearest citizen. Then, with their heavy javelins so held as to be used either as spears or clubs, the soldiers descended into the Forum, and, with the captive in their midst, began their progress toward the street and gate that led to the Carthaginian camp. There was no weak delay in this prog-

ress, no requests for passage; the escort clove through the mass of the people, as a war galley dashes through the breakers of a turbulent sea. A spray of human beings that strove to escape but could not, boiled up about the prow; a wake of bodies, writhing or senseless, fell behind the stern, while, at either side, the stout javelins rose and fell like the strokes of oars, splashing up blood for foam.

The taunts and threats that had assailed the prisoner died away amid shrieks of terror or pain and the deep rumble of the mob. Stupid with drink, drunk with the exultation of ungoverned power, they wondered vaguely, as they crushed back, why their new friends should strike, merely because they,—the Capuan people,—allies of Carthage, strove to punish a traitor and a common enemy. The prisoner's lips were seen moving, as his captors hurried him along; but no speech from them could be heard, until the Forum had been nearly traversed. Then, on the hush born of surprise and efforts to escape blows, the words of Magius were audible, at least to those nearest.

He was protesting against this violation of the treaty. He was speaking of himself; a Capuan, than whom no one was of higher rank, being dragged in chains to the camp of an ally

who had sworn that no Carthaginian should have power over a citizen of Capua. At the mention of his rank, malice and envy lent to some of the cowed rabble courage to jeer once more. Then he had asked, how they expected that an ally so careless of recently sworn obligations would respect his vow that no Capuan would be compelled to do military service against his will; whereupon, some of those who heard looked serious, for this seemed reasonable, and brought the possibility of evil unpleasantly home to them. Finally, he congratulated them upon this marvellous, new-found freedom which the Carthaginian alliance had brought, and which they had been celebrating so earnestly.

Perolla and his companions had found themselves crushed against the portico of the temple of Hercules, in which, only the day before, had been established, also, the worship of the Tyrian Melkarth, out of compliment to the new alliance.

At first they had realized but little of what was going on before and around them. They had listened vacantly to crazy rumours of how the statue of Jupiter in the Senate House had bowed to Hannibal as he entered, and how the Senate had forthwith saluted him as a god and declared him the patron and protector of

the city; and, again, to other rumours even more wild of how the wives of all the Capuans had been decreed to be given to the Carthaginians, in return for which the women of Rome were to be surrendered to the Capuans by their victorious allies.

When Decius Magius was led out in custody of the soldiers, Perolla was trying to think whether, after all, he would not prefer Marcia to Cluvia. Then followed the passage through the crowded Forum, straight toward the exit beside the temple of Hercules, and Perolla found himself within a spear's length of his captive friend, whose words of protest and warning fell upon his ears like molten lead, and whose reproachful eyes gazed into his own, piercing through them to his brain and dissipating the fumes of intoxication as sunlight melts the fog. Decius had not spoken to him, for he was mindful that such speech might bring suspicion upon the younger man, but his look had said all that his tongue refrained from saying, and Perolla realized his degradation and his shame.

He started forward and cried out:—

"I was mad, my father; *mad!* do you hear? It was because I knew suddenly that I loved her, and that she would never love me! and

then I rushed out and met others who were drinking, and we feasted and drank until I knew nothing. Pardon! pardon!"

Suddenly he became conscious that Decius and his guards were gone. Had he heard his plea? Surely yes, for did not he, Perolla, now hear his friend's eyes saying to him that he was but a fool who had added to folly, philosophy, and to both, weakness, and to all, madness? He looked around at his companions. Some were gaping at him vacantly, some were laughing. Cluvia tried to grasp his arm, and he shook her off and saw her stumble and roll down the steps that led up to the portico; then a new commotion arose in the direction of the Senate House, and the attention of the bystanders was diverted. More Carthaginian soldiers were forming and marching through the mob that now opened to give passage of double width; and, as the escort came nearer, Perolla saw Hannibal, clad in the gown of a Capuan senator, moving calmly in their midst.

A new frenzy came to his brain to take the place of the fumes of wines: perhaps it was one compounded of that and of shame and horror and revenge. He groped under his torn tunic and found his dagger; then, brandishing it, he burst down through the crowd, uttering inco-

herent words, and threw himself, like a wild beast, upon the guards.

He had stabbed one through the throat and another in the shoulder, before he was beaten down by a blow from the staff of a javelin. A moment later, the first soldier to recover from the surprise of the incident bent over him with drawn sword.

A sharp exclamation from behind checked the descending thrust, and the soldier turned quickly. Hannibal stood beside him, with a thoughtful smile upon his lips.

"Would you kill a citizen of Capua? a man of our allies?" he said quietly.

The African looked around stupidly. That he should not crush the Italian vermin forthwith was beyond his comprehension, but evidently such was not the schalischim's wish. Grumbling, he slipped his sword slowly back into its sheath, and, at that moment, several of the Capuan senators in Hannibal's train gathered round him with protestations and expressions of regret. The general looked at them and frowned.

"I have been with you scarcely two days," he said, "and now you try to murder me."

The senators fell upon their knees, kissing his gown and hands, in a frenzy of horror at the thought.

"Who is this fellow?" asked Hannibal, turning Perolla over with his foot. Then, recognizing the son of Pacuvius Calavius, he went on: "Some one of no consequence, doubtless; dust of the street that stings when the wind drives it," and he glared around at the prostrate senators.

They glanced at the senseless figure, as if hardly daring so much. Some knew him, more did not; but all united in protesting their ignorance.

Hannibal viewed them with drooping lids, and the smile returned to his lips. Perolla stirred slightly.

Again he addressed the Capuans, raising his voice somewhat, so that the crowd might hear.

"What is your law for the punishment of such a crime?"

Those who had not recognized the assassin, cried out, "Death." Others, divided between the more powerful enmity of Hannibal and the slower revenge of Calavius, made their lips move but were silent, hoping to escape notice in the shout of the others. A few of these were envious of the young man's father; more feared him.

Hannibal noted their confusion and came to their relief.

"But perhaps so wicked a man is not a Capuan, after all. It is difficult to believe that the gods would suffer such impiety to lurk in a city so beloved as yours; and, if no one knows him —"

A chorus of disclaimers snatched at the proffered evasion, and the smile on Hannibal's lips grew more subtle, as he said: —

"In that case, the treaty does not stand, and you, my fathers, are relieved from the burden of his trial and punishment. I am still free to condemn an ally of Rome. Let your rods and axe do their office."

The senators were standing now, and several of them winced and looked frightened at the swift result of their complaisance. One, even, gathered courage to say: —

"When is it my lord's will that punishment fall?"

Hannibal eyed him closely for a moment.

"Here, in your forum, and now," he said, "provided you would give prompt warning to such vermin."

The Capuan shifted uneasily and looked down. Several of the soldiers had already lifted Perolla to his feet, and, holding him upright, had torn away what remained of his garments; others sent for the executioners, and,

in a moment, these appeared with the instruments of their calling.

It was doubtful whether the prisoner had recovered full consciousness when the first rod fell upon his shoulders, but he groaned and writhed slightly in the grasp of the four soldiers who held him extended upon the pavement.

Then Hannibal turned away, ordering one of his officers to remain and see the end. He signed to the Capuans to follow him on.

"Such jackals, my fathers, are not worthy that men of rank and wealth should watch them die," he said lightly. "The rabble will provide him with sufficient audience."

And the senators, with awed and thoughtful faces, followed in the train of the captain-general of Carthage.

VIII.

DIPLOMACY.

PACUVIUS CALAVIUS sat in the atrium of his house. Black robed from head to foot, with hair and beard untrimmed and uncombed, and face and hands foul with dirt, he rocked to and fro and groaned. From time to time he ran his fingers through beard and hair, and uttered the measured cry of the Greek mourners.

An hour before, one of the senators had stolen furtively in, and, having hurriedly related the grewsome scene just enacted in the Forum, had sneaked out again as if he were a spy passing through hostile lines. None other of the friends of the afflicted father had ventured to bear or send a message of condolence. It was as if the house of the once acknowledged leader had been marked for the pestilence—and no pestilence was more to be shunned than the deadly blight of broken power. Even the slaves shifted about in embarrassed silence, offered little service, and obeyed as if conscious

that obedience was something of an indiscretion, and was liable at any moment to become a crime. Some had slipped away to their quarters, and had begun to discuss the relative possibilities of freedom, wholesale execution, or a new master, when the coming blow should fall upon this one.

To Marcia, on the other hand, had been born a feeling of sympathy for her host, that, for the present, overcame the contempt with which he had inspired her—a contempt scarcely lessened by the repulsive ostentation of his mourning. She alone ventured to minister to his wants and to beg him to partake of food and drink. Perhaps her attitude was due in a measure to the horror with which she herself had listened to the morning's news. To be sure, she had not admired the character of Perolla. It had in it too much of the weakness and puerility engendered by the bastard Greek culture fashionable in lower Italy, and which naturally attained its most offensive form in the towns of Italian origin. Still, he had been faithful to Rome, and there was something within that told her his madness and ruin were not entirely disconnected with her own personality. Word, too, had just been brought her that both Ligurius and Caipor had died of

their injuries. They had seemed on the road to recovery when she visited them on the previous day, and this sudden misfortune filled her with new forebodings, mingled with a suspicion too horrible to dwell upon. As for Decius Magius, she had barely seen him, yet she had felt him to be one of all others upon whom she could rely—an Italian uncorrupted by Capuan luxury, a worthy descendant of the rugged Samnite stock, a Roman in all but name; and now he was snatched away, a prisoner in the hands of enemies who knew nothing of mercy. Still, he had approved of her design; had seen in it the possibility of success; and there was at least a consolation in the thought that, without friends or allies, no one but herself would now be cognizant of the fulfilment of her impending degradation.

Another hour had passed; into Marcia's mind had come the calmness of a fixed resolve. Calavius still moaned and cried out his measured "Aêi! aêi!"

Suddenly a tumult of noises sounded from the street: the approaching murmur of a multitude, the footsteps of men, shouts of applause, cries of wonder or warning, and sharp words of command.

Ah! the end was near, now. Calavius began

to imagine himself stretching out his neck to the sword, and he sought, by proclaiming his willingness and welcome, to stay the chilling of his blood, the trembling of his lips and hands.

Staves were beating upon the outer door; the hum of voices in the street rose and fell and rose again.

"Open the door, Phœnix," mumbled Calavius, as he rocked and swayed. "Open the door and let them enter. I am an old man. My son is dead. What matters a few years of life? I pray to the gods that the barbarians may not hack me. You shall see how easy I will make it—if they have but a sharp sword." Suddenly he sprang to his feet and grasped Marcia's arm. "They will not scourge me? Surely they will not scourge me? I am a senator and the friend of Carthage!—will the door hold? Hasten, my daughter; run and tell me whether they are guarding the street in the rear—before the tradesmen's gate."

The beating upon the door still continued, with short intermissions, and Marcia surmised that the porter was probably skulking in the attic with his fellow-slaves. Calavius had turned suddenly from the depths of despair and the height of resignation to a keen desire

for life. He had hurried away to seek for some unguarded exit, heedless, for the moment, of what even Marcia fully realized: the utter impossibility of a man so well known escaping unaided through a hostile city and without a friendly land whereto to turn his flight. He had left her standing in the court, to be a first prey of the assailants, whether Capuans or Carthaginians, and she reasoned that it would be better, or at least quicker, to unbar the door before it should be broken in: she was wondering, in fact, at the forbearance that had preserved it thus far from more violent assault. Calavius had been gone some time. Doubtless he had escaped or, recognizing the uselessness of his attempt, was hiding somewhere, and, in either event, nothing would be lost by judicious parleying.

Arranging her robe, she walked slowly through the hall, slid back the bolts one by one, and let the door swing out into the street; then she stood, dazed and frightened, for the sight that met her eyes was Hannibal himself reclining in a litter borne by four Nubians. The curtains were thrown back, and he was leaning out, evidently giving some directions to the attendants whose summons had thus far failed to obtain an answer. Beside the litter

stood the priest, Iddilcar, with folded arms and look bent upon the ground. Around them were ranged a strong guard of Africans, and, back through the streets, as far as she could see, the Capuan rabble were thronging forward, curious or bloodthirsty.

All this was visible in a moment, and then the general, attracted by the creaking of the door and the exclamation of the crowd, looked up and saw Marcia standing upon the threshold.

The litter was set down at an imperceptible signal, and he stepped out, robed in a loose gown of black entirely without ornaments, and with hair and beard uncombed and sprinkled lightly with ashes. Marcia stared in wonder. Surely this could not be the Carthaginian method of announcing judgment or execution! She caught a flash of subtle lightning from the eyes of Iddilcar, though these had not seemed to neglect for a moment their close scrutiny of the pavement. Then Hannibal stood before her, bowing low and speaking in suppressed tones:—

“The gods be with you and dwell within this house! I have come to look upon the face of my father, and, if may be, to console him. Praise be to Tanis for the omen that

you have opened to us, rather than one whose servile duty it was. So shall our entrance be free and our going joyful."

He had cast a rapid glance around, as he spoke, and Marcia knew that he divined why the service of tending the door had been left to her—a free woman and a guest; yet he was pleased to ignore all inferences, and to attribute her act to some divine will. His words, too, were more than friendly, and, if they covered no snare of Punic faith, augured safety and continued favour.

"I have come," he continued, "that I might mingle my tears with those of my father who mourns the death of a son."

Marcia stood amazed. Had they not been told how this man had himself ordered the execution of Perolla! How, then, could even a Carthaginian show such effrontery! Still, it was necessary to think quickly, and her woman's wit told her that, in any event, Calavius' best chance of safety was to seem to accept the visit in the spirit which cloaked it. So thinking, she led the visitors into the peristyle,—Hannibal, Iddilcar, and some twenty soldiers who followed as if by previous orders; while the rest mounted guard before the vestibule. Murmuring some word of apology, she

hurried back through the garden to the tradesmen's door.

It was still closed and barred, facts which, together with the rumble of the crowd without, showed that Calavius' plan of escape had proven impracticable. Then she began a careful search, becoming more agitated, with each moment, about the difficulty of explaining the delay. At last she found him, hidden away under a couch in one of the slaves' apartments, so senseless with terror that several minutes passed, before he could grasp her tale of Hannibal's presence, and of the chance of safety it offered. When, however, he understood that there was yet room for diplomacy,—that the visitors were not mere executioners with orders to obey,—he drew himself out from his hiding-place, alert and active. The need of haste, in view of the time already lost, was apparent; but, nevertheless, he paused in the garden to wallow a moment in the mould and plunge his hands into its depth.

Marcia saw with disgust, but she led on until they reached the peristyle; when, slipping aside into one of the cells, she watched the playing of the game.

Calavius paused a moment at the entrance. Then, groaning deeply to attract attention, he

shambled forward, and, throwing himself at full length before Hannibal, seized the hem of his robe and pressed it eagerly to his lips.

"Ah, my master!" he cried. "Slay me, slay me at once or with tortures. Surely that man is not fit to live whose loins have engendered such a monster of wickedness. Only by death can I hope to expiate my offence and retain the favour of the gods."

"Rise, my father," said the captain-general, and to Marcia's ears his voice rang true with sympathy. He reached out his hand to help Calavius. "Do you not see that I also wear mourning for this melancholy error?"

"Never shall I rise or face you," cried Calavius, "until you give me your oath that I shall have your forgiveness before I die. Ah, the monster! the parricide! who would slay, at one stroke, both him who had brought him up to better deeds, and him who is indeed the father of his country. Ah, gods! the shame of it! Give orders, lord, quickly — only vow first that you forgive me."

Hannibal's tones were low and deep with sorrow, and, by an imperceptible effort of what must have been prodigious strength, he raised the unwilling Calavius to his feet.

"Listen, my father," he said. "Have they

not told you how I knew not the young man? He was stained and dishevelled with revellings in honour of our alliance—in honour of me, unhappy one. Perchance the Lord Bacchus, whom you worship, willed to have him for his own, for surely it was he that raised the young man's hand against me. Ah! my father, did I not know how this son of thine was most beautiful, best, and bravest of the Capuan youth? Had I not marked him out for signal honour—only less than yours, my father and his? See, now, how the gods confuse the affairs of men. It was at the banquet that I learned his worth, and determined that he should love me and find in me a friend."

"Truly yes," interrupted Calavius, "and you had won his heart, for, walking in the garden, he told me as much, only adding that he must appear to turn to you slowly—for the honour of his name among the partisans of Rome, whom may the gods confound as they have done."

Hannibal smiled softly, as he took up the words:—

"All this I knew well, being somewhat learned in men, my father; and now the gods have smitten my brother with madness that he should try to slay me, and myself with blindness

that I should, unknowingly, order the death of one I loved most. Look, my father, I join you in your mourning, with black robes and ashes; I come to weep with you at the feet of Fate — you whose love for me has lost you a son, and to offer you myself to be a son in his place.”

Calavius embraced him, mumbling prayers and vows and endearments in the sudden joy of escaped death. Iddilcar raised his eyes from the study of the mosaics and turned aside, shaking as if with some strong emotion, and Hannibal spoke again.

“One thing more, my father, I would speak to you of, though for my best interests I should hold my peace nor make dissensions among allies. There were those with me when this evil happened — men of your Capuan Senate — who knew this youth better than I, and whom I am convinced suspected the truth; yet they spoke not —”

“Ah!” cried Calavius, “and you have their names writ down for me? We shall slay them!”

Hannibal’s face wore an expression strangely inscrutable as he answered: —

“Yes, my father, I have their names whom I suspect; and they shall surely die. Grant it to

me, though, that I alone keep them and expiate my own fault by avenging your wrong. This I swear by Baal-Melkarth and Baal-Moloch to accomplish at the season best for our plans. Therefore I tell you the fact, but without names, that you may know that you have enemies and walk warily, while I, your son, shall, under the gods, be your reliance for protection and revenge."

Another thought seemed to be struggling for utterance in the bosom of Calavius—a wish prompted by religion but checked by prudence. Twice he raised his head as if to speak, and twice his eyes wandered. Then Hannibal spoke again, as if reading the other's thoughts:—

"I have also, my father, given orders that funeral honours be paid to my brother; a pyre rich with woven fabrics and wine and oil and spices, and, from my own share of the Etruscan spoils, I have chosen a vase boldly pictured with a combat of heroes."

Tears gushed anew from the eyes of Calavius at this added evidence of thoughtful friendship, and once again he embraced his benefactor, but with somewhat more of dignity, now that the fear of death was removed.

Suddenly Marcia became conscious of an

intruding presence beside her, and, turning, her eyes fell upon the repulsive features of Iddilcar, that seemed to sneer through the semi-gloom. She shuddered and drew back against the wall. Iddilcar held out his arms which the broad sleeves of his robe left bare to elbow. An expression of eager lust made his face even more hideous than did the sneer of a moment past.

"Come, little bird," he said, "and I will charm you. Moon of Tanis! Lamp of Proserpine! Essence of all the Heavens! do you not see I love you? — I, Iddilcar, priest of Melkarth. Behold, my robe is dark. It mourns — not for the fool who died, but because you have not loved me. Love, and it will gleam again in violet, and all the bracelets that hung from my arms at the banquet shall be yours."

She pressed her hands to her face; she felt herself swaying upon her trembling knees; only the support of the wall saved her from sinking down.

After a moment's silence he began again: —

"What is an old man, and weak — a sport of foreigners — to me who am young and strong, and by whose word even the schalischim of Carthage must march or halt? I, the favoured one of Melkarth, beseech you, a Roman, for

favour, because Adonis wills it. See how I come to you, unpermitted, from those who cajole each other, and I show you my heart. Love me! love me! leave this keeper, who is but an old woman, and you shall be a priestess in Carthage, and the people shall swarm around and cast their jewels and wealth before you, for the deity—that shall be you alone; and we shall feast and love and love and feast again in such splendour as not even Carthage has ever known —”

She could restrain her feelings no longer; all her resolves seemed to slip from her in the presence of this man; she thrust out her hands and turned her head away with a shiver of utter disgust. Her movement was vague in the dim light, but he saw it, and his face darkened.

“What is this house?” he exclaimed harshly. “How long will it stand against me? Shall I not crush its root, even as its branch was torn off to-day? Filth! vermin! dust! Shall not its flower lie in my bosom to bloom forever, if she wills—or to bloom for a moment and wither and be cast away, if she wills not?”

He strode forward and caught her wrist; his hot breath steamed in her face.

“No! no! I *hate* you! Go!” The words sprang from her lips, without power to hold

them back, and she struggled frantically in his grasp; she heard his teeth grinding, as, mad with passion, he strove to bind her arms to her sides. At that moment a rattling of weapons from the peristyle seemed to bring him to a consciousness of his surroundings. Releasing her, he half turned, and she sank down in the corner of the cell. The visit was evidently over, and Hannibal, about to take his leave, was glancing around, evidently in search of the missing priest.

Iddilcar spoke low and rapidly:—

"I will return at once. Wait me till I come, or I will have you given to a syn-
tagma of Africans."

He was out in the peristyle now, bowing low before the captain-general. Then he whispered in his ear—probably some explanation of his absence, of how he had been keeping watch against treachery; for Hannibal nodded several times, and, again embracing Calavius, accepted his escort to the door, giving his arm to steady the steps of the older man.

IX.

THE BAIT.

MARCIA crouched, huddled in the farthest corner of the cell, and listened to the receding footsteps of the visitors. Then she heard new sounds echoing through the house: the rushing feet of slaves descending from their quarters, striving to gain their stations unobserved; the sharp tongue of Calavius now loosed from the bonds of terror, and rating them soundly for their unfaithfulness and cowardice; the patter of excuses and protestations. In a few moments the quarters above resounded with the shrieks and groans of those condemned to the lash; for the wrath and indignation of Calavius, generally the mildest of masters, were spurred to vindictive bitterness by a consciousness of his late terror and abasement. "They were guilty of all crimes, and, worst of all, of the rankest ingratitude. Let them learn that their master was still strong enough to

punish." So the scourges fell, and the victims screamed and writhed.

All these things Marcia heard, but they meant little to a mind so full of internal conflict as was hers. What was she to believe of herself? Had she not marked out a course of self-devotion and sacrifice which was to gain respite and safety for her country, revenge upon its enemies? Had not others, notably Decius Magius, been forced unwillingly to admit the possible efficiency of her plan? Yet now, when the gods had shown her favour beyond all anticipation—had brought the chosen quarry into her net—she had thrown all aside and yielded to her womanly weakness, her instinct of modesty, her sense of personal repulsion. What right had she to think of herself as a woman! He, for whose love her sex had been dear to her, was gone—a pallid shade who could no longer be sensitive to her beauty, a vague being sent far hence into the land of the four rivers by these very men whom she had devoted to destruction. What though the virtues that had beaten down her resolves had been good once—good for Marcia the woman? They were evil for that Marcia who had resolved to be a heroine, and who was now learning how

hard it is for the female to seek the latter crown without losing the former. Again and again she struggled with herself, swayed back and forth by the counter-currents of conflicting shames, until the thought of death, as a final possibility, revived to steel her purpose. The sacrifice and the shame would be short, and, in the consciousness of her work accomplished, she could die, going before the lady Proserpine with a pure heart that need not fear to meet the eyes of Sergius when they should ask its secret.

Rising quickly, she hastened to her chamber by passages where she would not be likely to meet her host. Whatever intentions he might have entertained toward her had been effectually suspended, if not obliterated, by the course of events, and now he was much too busy setting in order his demoralized household to think of her presence. Therefore, she reached her apartment unnoticed, and, summoning her waiting women, surrendered herself to the tedious process of adornment according to the accepted taste of Magna Græcia.

The afternoon was spent, ere all had been finished. Then she ate hurriedly and with little appetite, drinking deeply of the Lesbian wine till her cheeks flushed through the rouge,

and her eyes sparkled. Calavius had gone out, busy about affairs of state, and eager to collect the strained threads of his influence—threads that might be strengthened by their very straining, in the hands of a politician who realized how men were ready to grant every complaisance to one whom they had deserved ill of and whose vengeance they feared. Marcia found herself wondering whether Idilcar would indeed return as he had said. Perhaps her attitude had seemed to him so unfavourable that he would strike first;—but when and how? Perhaps affairs of state detained him also. Perhaps, even, this man, Hannibal, whose eye pierced through all subtuges, had already divined the danger and set himself to nullify it. Perhaps—and then, as she was reclining in the larger dining hall, one of the slaves entered and whispered in her ear. She rose quickly.

“Tell my Lord that she whom he favours awaits him at the hemicycle in the garden, and guide him to me.”

She spoke, marvelling at her steady tones, and, turning, walked, with drooping head, to the semicircular, marble seat;—not the single seat, back amongst the foliage, where she had met Perolla; “the philosopher’s chair,” as Calavius

had called it laughingly, where his son retired to commune with thoughts too great for men. Sinking down at one end of the hemicycle, she studied the carved lion's head that ornamented the arm-rest, and the paw, thrusting out from the side-support, upon the pavement beneath. It troubled her that such wonderful handicraft had not considered that the head was entirely out of proportion with the paw; and yet, if the former were larger or the latter smaller, surely they would not fit well in the places they were intended to ornament. What a provoking dilemma, to be sure — and at such a time, for, glancing suddenly up, she saw Iddil-car's dark, repulsive features bent upon her with a terrible intentness. All her former loathing surged back over her heart with tenfold force, sickening her with its suffocating weight.

"Light of the two eyes of Baal," he murmured softly. "Look kindly upon thy servant. Smile upon his love, that thy light and his worship may be eternal. Behold! for thee I cast aside the worship of the lord Melkarth!"

He tore apart his long, violet tunic, showing his throat and bosom hung with necklaces. His arms, bare to the shoulders, glittered with heavy bracelets.

"Lo! the spoils of Italy assigned to my

Lord I give to thee"; and, taking off necklace and bracelet, he knelt and piled them at her feet, raising and parting his arms in the attitude of oblation.

Charmed as by the stare of a serpent, Marcia watched him with horrible disgust, yet unable to turn her eyes aside.

"What is Tanis to thee!" he went on. "What, Ceres! What, Proserpine! Ashera! Derceto!—goddesses afar from men—goddesses whom, not seeing, we worship faintly with sacrifice and ceremony. But thou—thou shalt dwell forever in the temple upon the Square of Melkarth. Come!"

Again, and in spite of every resolve, Marcia felt the overmastering sense of woman's loathing that stood so obstinately between herself and the rôle she had marked out. It was too much. She could not—could not suffer this man for a moment, even with the release of swiftly hastening death before her eyes. She struggled to her feet, groping about, turning, and, with a stifled scream, she sought to fly; but her strength refused her even this service.

In an instant, he was up and beside her; his hand had roughly grasped her shoulder, half tearing away the cyclas; his little eyes blazed

with vindictive fury; his nostrils dilated; his coarse lips writhed in hungry passion.

"Ah, slave! You would escape? Where? where? In this house? Ah, fool! Could you not measure the comedy of this morning? Do you think this old imbecile, this man condemned to follow his mouse-killing son, can protect you from the meanest Nubian in the army? Do you think—ah!" and he raised his hand, as if to strike.

Wrenching herself loose by a quick movement, Marcia turned and faced him with all the blood of the Torquati flushing in her cheeks, all their fire blazing in her eyes.

"Dog of a pulse-eater!" she cried, and he shrank back before the vehemence of her tone. "Do I care what you do? Break your alliance with these people if you wish—an alliance of fools with fools, knaves with knaves! Break it, before it be cloven asunder for you by the sword of Rome. Doubtless your chief will sacrifice all his plans to your cowardly lust. Kill my protector, tear down his house, and—kill me!—me, for whom there is neither sowing nor reaping in this matter."

All his arrogance and violence had vanished, cowed and crushed by her outbreak; but, even as he cringed before her, the gleam of Oriental cunning had taken its place.

"Ah! now, indeed, art thou more beautiful than the lady Tanis," he muttered, clasping and unclasping his hands, as if in ecstasy. "Now, indeed, do I love thee." His voice sank to a whisper, and he glanced about timorously. "And so it is neither sowing nor reaping with you, my pretty?" he went on. "Fools we may be, but not the fools to be blind to your sowing — not the fools who shall not root up your seed before the day of reaping. Did not you, a Roman, counsel Mago to delay? Did you not, foolish one, even give such counsel at the banquet of welcome to the schalischim, until I laughed in my cup to see a silly girl who would cajole men of government and of war?"

Marcia stood, rigid and pale. All her plans seemed shivering about her. She was doomed to fail then — fail after all, through the cunning of these vermin. Still she struggled to retain her composure.

"Liar!" she said. "Do I not know that if you spoke truth I would already be buried under hurdles weighted with stones?"

He laughed softly. "Why?" he asked. "What can you avail, coining lead for us who perceive its falseness? Nay, you are even of use to Hannibal, for, by your very eagerness,

he has come to Maharbal's thinking, that all must be done speedily, if we would take Rome. Even now Capuans work night and day building our engines. Soon they will set them up before your gates. We shall winter in Rome, as the guests of the lady Marcia who has invited us. Therefore Hannibal grants you life and to be a comfort to his friend and father, Pacuvius Calavius, in his declining years;" and he laughed again, but harshly and sneeringly.

Marcia could scarcely keep her feet under the crushing force of these blows. In what vain manner had she, an inexperienced girl, blind to all but a noble purpose, contended with men whose cunning had sufficed to snare the chiefs of her people! Worse even, she had herself forged the weapons for the destruction of all she had hoped to save. Iddilcar watched her from under half-closed lids, noting every line of her face, and reading its struggle and its despair.

"And so it is wisdom for us to march north at once?" he said softly.

"How do I know? — a woman?"

He smiled subtly and ignored the change of front he had wrested from her.

"Love me, and I swear by the crown of Melkarth that Hannibal shall winter in Capua."

She started, as if from the touch of fire. Had her ears heard words of his, or was it only a belated thought coursing from her brain to her heart?

He stepped nearer and spoke again:—

“Love me, pretty one, and Hannibal shall winter in Capua,—yea, though he hangs on the cross for it,—though all the armies of Carthage become food for dogs.”

At first she had been dreaming of new snares; but these last words and the vehemence of his tone brought her to an intuitive realization that this man was indeed prepared to give up god, country, general, friends,—all, so only that he might gratify his overmastering passion. The gods were indeed with her, after all,—were guiding her aright; and the knowledge steadied her self-control and strengthened her resolve. What omen of favour could be more potent than this snatching of victory out of the very hands of ruin—this moulding of ruin into a source of victory?

So she spoke, calmly and evenly:—

“Perhaps you tell the truth, perhaps folly. How shall I know, any more than I know of this power to command commanders, of which you make such silly boast?”

“Not I—not I, lady,” he protested eagerly.

"Listen! It is the lord Melkarth that has always loved the colonies of Phœnicia, first among which is Carthage. It is he that has guided and guarded us through the perils of the deep and of the desert, of the skies and of the earth, of hunger and thirst, of beasts and men. What god equals him in our city! What god receives such gifts, such incense, such sacrifices! What though we fear Baal Moloch! Is it not the lord Melkarth whom we love? It is he who goes before our armies, that he may tell them when to attack, when to await the foe. I am his priest. Do you understand? I have spoken his words many times. Now he shall speak mine."

Marcia could hardly fail to understand the nature of the power which this man now proposed to lay at her feet; yet it all seemed horribly impossible that he, a priest, could dare such sacrilege for such end. Had she been Fabius, Paullus, or even Sergius,—men who were already groping amid the Greek schools of doubt, and were coming to regard the religion of the state more as an invaluable means of curbing the vices of the low and ignorant than as a divine light for the learned,—had she been such as these, this proposal of Iddilcar would have seemed incredible only on

account of its treason to his country. And yet, in one sense, she was better fitted than they to understand the Carthaginian. True scepticism had found little room under the mantle of the gloomy, the terrible cult that swayed the destinies of the Chanaanitish races. Even the priests, while they were ready enough to use the people's faith to minister to their own ends, trembled before their savage gods. Low, brutish, full of inconsistent wiles their faith might be, but such faith it was as an educated Roman could with difficulty comprehend. On the other hand, the minds of the women of Rome had not as yet swerved from unquestioning belief in the gods consulting and the gods apart, and the Torquati were most conservative among all the great houses. From childhood up — and in years she was scarcely more than a child — all these had been very real to her. Pomona wandered through every orchard beside her beloved Vertumnus; Pan and his sylvan brood sported behind the foliage of every copse. She would as soon have thought of questioning their presence as of doubting her own being. Marcia believed; the average Roman patrician affected to believe and indulged in his polite, Hellenic doubts; the Carthaginian priest, while he believed, with all

Marcia's fervour, in a theology to which Marcia's was tender as the divine fellowship of the Phæacians, yet conceived that it was entirely legitimate to play tricks upon his fiend-gods — to pit his cunning against theirs. If they caught him, perhaps they would laugh, perhaps consume him in the flames of their wrath. It depended on their mood — whether they had dined well, perhaps; and he would take his chances. He stood, now, toward his deities, just where the heroes of Homer had stood centuries before. He was a living evidence of the Asiatic birth of Greek theology — only, in the Asian races, religious feeling was not religious thought, did not arise from the mind or change, like the cults of Europe, as the mind that evolved or adopted them developed and outgrew its offspring.

So it was that, while Marcia, but for her instinctive realization of the truth, might have been utterly unable to credit the sincerity of such prodigious wickedness, yet, armed with this intuition as a starting-point, she sought for and found reasons to support it. The purity of her own faith came to her aid. Perhaps the Punic gods were mere demons, as they seemed to be, and Iddilcar knew it and relied for protection upon the mightier

gods of Rome. In a sense, she reasoned on false premises, but her conclusion was, none the less, more accurate than would have been that of either Paullus or Sergius. For the time, at least, Iddilcar was entirely sincere. To be sure, if he could gain his end by mere promises, he preferred to deceive Marcia rather than Melkarth, but his plotting had not gotten so far as that yet. Now, his fierce, Oriental nature was consuming with that passion which, in it, took the place of all love. This Roman woman had aroused desires that he had never known in the gardens of Ashera; her face was to the faces of the courtesans who thronged the sacred woods on feast days, as the glory of the crescent moon was to the sputter of the rancid oil in the lamp that illumined the cell of Fancula Cluvia. Cunning beyond his race, learned in the strange learning of the East that had come to a few in Egypt and to fewer yet in Phoenicia, Iddilcar read the struggle that was taking place in the girl's mind.

"What do I care for Hannibal!" he cried; "for the Great Council! for Carthage! I would give them all to you for one kiss. To him who has learned all secret knowledge, the mind alone is God and city and home and friends, — everything, everything save love,"

and his voice, harsh and strident, sank to a whisper in which was compassed all the fierceness of ungoverned and ungovernable desire.

Marcia knew, now, that he was speaking the truth; that he would indeed stop at nothing; and, with the certainty, there came to her a strange mingling of exultation, terror, and calm. She saw this man, powerful with the power of the conqueror, learned with the learning of the student and of the ascetic, grovelling here at her feet—slave to a force against which no power, no philosophy could avail. She saw him crawl to her and press her robe to his lips; she heard him mumbling and whining like some animal, and she despised him and grew stronger in the light of her growing self-esteem. At last she spoke.

“It is well. I have listened and determined. Yes, you are right. I *have* wished that the army should not march north; I have wished that it should winter in Campania. I am a Roman; why should I not wish it? You say you can accomplish this. Do so, and you shall have your reward.”

Iddilcar sprang to his feet and threw out his arms to draw her to him; the breath came from his chest in short gasps; his eyes were suffused with tears through which he saw

something glitter; and his hands, clutching and unclutching, caught only air. Then his arms fell to his sides; he paused and looked stupidly at her. She had sprung back and was facing him defiantly with a short dagger raised to strike.

"Not so soon, slave," she said, and her voice rang in his ears like steel. "He who would reap must first sow."

"You do not love me," he said sheepishly, gnashing his teeth because he knew the foolishness of his words, and yet could say no others.

She laughed; then her face grew sober.

"No," she said; "I do not love you. Why should I? We love those who serve us well —"

"Ah! but I have promised," he broke in. "I am giving you everything."

"I want but one thing," she said, while the lines of her mouth hardened; "and, for that, I take no promise."

He lowered his head to avoid the straight flash of her eyes.

"It is I, then, who must trust — always I," he muttered. "How do I know you will give yourself when I earn you? — how do I know you will not kill yourself with that dagger? for you hate me," and then, with sudden fierce-

ness; "why should I not take my own? What hinders me?"

"This," said Marcia, touching the point with her finger.

Iddilcar shuddered.

"Listen now," she began, "and be reasonable. I have named my price, and you have said it is not too much. Why speak of love or hate? Earn me and take me."

"Yes," he echoed; for he was braver when his eyes studied the pavement; "why speak of love or hate? It is you I want—your kisses, your embraces. Who shall say that hatred may not flavour them better even than love?" and he sneered. "Ah! but how shall I know?"

"I am a Roman, and I have promised. Fulfil your Punic word as well, and I swear you shall have your pay, so surely,"—and then the memory of another day, happier, but oh! so bitterly regretted, came to her mind,— "so surely as Orcus sends not the dead back from Acheron. Now go."

He drew back, step by step, still facing her, longing to rebel, yet not daring, cringing, skulking like a whipped cur. He reached the end of the path; the entrance to the garden was behind him. He raised his clenched hand to

the heavens. "Ah, Melkarth!" burst from his lips, and, turning, he plunged into the house, running.

Marcia listened eagerly to the fall of his sandals. They died away, and the distant door creaked. Tears filled her eyes, and, shivering in every muscle, she sank down upon the seat and buried her face in her hands.

X.

MELKARTH.

Two moons had waxed and waned; Pacuvius Calavius had dined in his winter triclinium for the first time this year, and Marcia was rejoicing at the omen. She watched her host, as he lay back upon his couch, and noted with pity the change that had come over him. When he had greeted her coming, he had seemed not very much past middle age—a brisk man, well preserved in mind and body. Now he was old—very old—and the pallor and wrinkles were prominent through the flush of the wine and the paint with which he strove to hide them. Even his ambition was dead; he hardly sought the Senate House, but, stopping within doors, maundered querulously and unceasingly to Marcia, to his servants, to any one who would listen to him, of the blunders that were being made, and of how war and negotiations should be conducted, speaking always as a man for whom such things had no personal

interest. The diadem of Italy that had once blinded his eyes to good faith and oaths of alliance, had melted away in the flames of the pyre that consumed his son. As for Marcia, she had come to regard him with something of that indulgent consideration which we feel for the aged and infirm. His former attitude toward herself, which had filled her with contempt and disgust, had vanished utterly, and, in its place, was a fatherly kindness that had now no nearer object upon which to lavish itself. As for the household, what little discipline had once pertained, was gone. The slaves were no longer punished, and, slavelike, they presumed upon their master's gentleness or indifference. They pilfered right and left; they neglected duties and orders; until, at last, a large measure of the care of her host and his house devolved upon Marcia alone; and Marcia, also, had softened and grown kindlier, and was as slow to ask for punishments as was Calavius to decree them. They seemed like two who were awaiting death, and would not add to the measure of human misery, knowing, from their own, how great this was.

"Let them enjoy a false freedom for a few days longer," said Calavius. "Soon we shall be gone, and then—who knows? I have no

heirs, and the state may not deal so kindly with them." Strangely enough, he seemed always to assume Marcia's coming death along with his own; and when she gazed into her mirror, its story moulded well with that reflected in the mirror of her thoughts.

She had grown thin — very thin — and pale, and her eyes burned, large and luminous, as with the fires of fever. Her lips, too, were redder even than when the blood had tinted them with hues of more perfect vigour.

Hannibal had continued to preserve the attitude of respectful consideration which had marked his demeanour on that day of which they never spoke. He still greeted Calavius as, "father," when he came to ask about his health, and on the days when he did not come, he sent some Carthaginian of rank, generally Iddilcar, to make courteous inquiries in his stead.

Calavius, on the other hand, complained continuously of the schalischim's delay, and Hannibal listened with downcast face, frowning to himself, and made no answer except that he was the servant of the gods. Marcia's presence he entirely ignored. Still, he spent little of his time in Capua, and of this Calavius was now speaking.

"Truly did you note the news we have

received to-day, my daughter? Two of the new engines destroyed before Casilinum!—Casilinum, forsooth!—a paltry village, against which the Capuan children would hardly deign to march! It is Rome—Rome—Rome that calls—and this great general, this conqueror, sits down before Nuceria, Acerræ, Nola, Casilinum. Soon, mark me,” and his eyes gleamed prophetic, “Rome will sit down before Capua: and then, receive thou me, O Death, who art my friend and well-wisher!”

Marcia wondered at this vehemence, so different from his manner through all these weeks.

“But the omens, my father,” she said, after a moment’s pause. “I have heard that the gods of Carthage forbid the march north. Perhaps they fear to contend with the gods of Rome at the foot of their own hills.”

“Tush! girl,” exclaimed Calavius, impatiently. “Who does not know that the gods say such words as their thievish priests filch from them. Mark now this fellow that comes from the captain-general. Do you not see how the fingers of his left hand clutch and unclutch? Were Hannibal to crucify him and a few like, his gods might utter more favouring responses. Meanwhile, our engines that should thunder at your Capenian Gate are consumed before

mud heaps; and who knows but all the time some tree grows stouter that it may bear the weight of this Hannibal, the slave of gods that should be taught their place and their duties."

Marcia, despite her complicity, listened, shuddering, to these sacrilegious words; and, mingled with her shrinking from a philosophy that dared to talk of the immortals as mere means to be used or cast aside as human ends might dictate, was a terror lest similar reasoning should at last find place in Hannibal's mind and thus bring to naught her aims and her sacrifices. It was easy to see how the general chafed at the unwonted delay, and with what willingness he listened when another spoke the words which he himself dared not utter.

Calavius had but just finished his tirade when they both turned at a slight noise and saw Iddilcar standing in the entrance of the room. How long he had been there—what he had heard, neither knew, but his face wore the subtle smile which, though well-nigh native to its lines, yet seemed always to bear some hidden import.

"The favour of Melkarth and of the Baalim be with you!" he said softly. "Your servants,

my Pacuvius, are not over-well trained. There was no offer to bear word of my coming — no offer of attendance. The porter hardly deigned to swing the door for me.”

Marcia, knowing Iddilcar as she did, was prompt to take this speech in the light of an explanation of his eavesdropping; but the once sharp intelligence of Calavius had been too much deadened to search for secondary meanings.

“I am an old man, priest,” he said querulously. “Why should I leave stripes and crying behind me?”

Iddilcar shrugged his shoulders. “That may be,” he replied, “but if we had such servants as yours in Carthage we should send their shades ahead of us.”

He had indeed deftly parried any attack or inquiry. Then, suddenly, and of his own accord, he turned back to strike.

“And so you have been condemning the piety of the schalischim? the integrity of the college of priests? the truth of the gods themselves, for aught I know? Have a care!” — he was lashing himself into a fury — “I have listened to your words. If I reported them, how long before you would both be sent to Carthage to keep comradeship with that terrible

fellow, Decius Magius? Have care! have care lest the gods strike through me, their servant. Nevertheless the gods are merciful to those who bring offerings—peace-offerings of gold and jewels and raiment and spices. Come, what will you give me that I smother their wrath—I, Iddilcar, your friend, whom you speak ill of behind his back—whom you hate—yes, both of you;” and his eyes flashed at Marcia with a strange recklessness that she had never seen in them.

Wondering and terrified, she listened to his outburst of rage, but Calavius heard it calmly, and answered, without troubling himself to probe its import.

“You shall have a talent of silver and such jewels as you choose,” he said, rising. “I will go and give the orders.”

“Orders!” sneered the other; but to Marcia it seemed that the word and look covered suspicion at the ready acquiescence of the Capuan.

“Then I will go with you and see that these orders are obeyed. Come; ah!—” and he turned to Marcia; “and will you be here when I return? I wish to speak with you.”

She inclined her head, still wondering, and when they had left the room her wonder deepened. Surely a change had taken place. A

Carthaginian was always said to love money, but for Iddilcar to seek to obtain it by such crude and violent means, from a man whom his general professed to honour and protect, seemed to augur something of which she knew not. Either Hannibal's protection was to be, for some reason, withdrawn, or else?—but what else could embolden the priest to such license? The look, too, with which he had regarded herself! She had restrained him with some difficulty during the past months, but now she felt instinctively that her control had vanished. Even violence seemed near; for that Iddilcar could be fool enough to dream that his mere repetition of the words he had listened to, would enrage Hannibal, she did not for a moment believe. The general had heard the same from Calavius, face to face, and had only frowned and bit his lips behind his beard, as if feeling their justice. What, then, could have happened?

“Ah! you are still here.”

She looked up quickly, and saw that the priest had returned alone. He went on, speaking quickly and nervously, but in low tones:—

“The time has come. And so you were thinking, thinking of what? Was it rejoicing that Tanis was to give you to me so soon?”

and he showed his teeth, like a dog. "Listen: they suspect me. I have done all as you wished, but there was a council to-day in the camp before Casilinum, and Maharbal fell on his knees, as he did after Cannæ, and begged to march north,—not with the cavalry alone, as then; he knew it was too late for that: and the schalischim knit his brows and frowned. Then Hasdrubal and Karthalo added their prayers and pleadings, thronging around him, and then he turned his sombre face to me, and asked if it was permitted; but, before I could answer, for my mind was disturbed, that animal whom they call, 'The Fighter' had drawn his sword and held it over my head, crying out: 'Yes, friends, it is permitted—see! It is permitted;' and then I felt myself grow pale, and I heard the great beast laugh. A moment later and Hannibal had ordered him to put up his sword, and I saw Maharbal whispering quick words in the general's ear, among which it seemed to me that his lips formed your name. Again, Hannibal asked: 'Is it permitted, Iddilcar? or what sacrifice will your lord have from us? Have we not served him faithfully? Is there aught he wishes?' and I felt all their eyes on me; but, above all, were yours that were soon to smile. Therefore I

took courage, which the lord Melkarth granted, and spoke boldly, explaining that I had as yet been able to win no favour, though I had prayed long and fasted and lashed myself with thongs, whereupon Hannibal-the-Fighter made as if to tear off my mantle, laughing in his beard; and when I saw they did not believe me, my terror came back. Then it was that Melkarth shed wisdom upon his servant, and, after a moment's thought, I spoke up, thus:—

“‘Listen, lords,’ I said; ‘I am a native Carthaginian, like you all, and I reverence the gods. Howbeit it may chance that here, beyond the sea, it is not so easy to win their favour, so that they shall go before us. New and strange sacrifices and pleadings wherein I am untaught may be needed to pierce the denser ether of this land. Truly, lords, as ye have not failed in piety, neither have I erred in divination, for Melkarth has spoken many times, telling me of the unnumbered woes that would overwhelm the army if it marched upon Rome unbidden, and he hath spoken truth, and I have saved you to revile me for it—only I would learn if there be yet speech better fitted to his ear.’ I paused, and they were silent, wondering. Then I spoke on: ‘Grant me, lords, three days, that I may journey to Cumæ;

for I have heard that a woman dwells there, wise in the ways of the gods, and, if I bear her rich presents, it may happen that she will teach me the words that shall pierce this dull air, even to where Baal Melkarth sits enthroned in Mappalia, that he may grant all your wishes.' So I crossed my arms upon my breast, and, bowing my head, listened. 'At Cumæ?' growled Jubellius Taurea, who sat near me, 'say, rather, at the house of Pacuvius Calavius,' and I felt myself trembling, for then I knew surely that I had heard Maharbal aright, and that I was suspected. Still, I stood fast, and at last Hannibal spoke: 'Go to Cumæ for three days,' he said sternly. 'Take what you wish — one talent, two, three; only bring back the words that shall win favour;' and Hasdrubal added: 'And harken! lord; if you win not favour, we shall yet march, and peradventure you shall come with us — if they drive not the nails too deep;' but there was an outcry at this, for they trembled lest Melkarth should smite them, and Hasdrubal spoke again, grumbling: 'Ah, masters, you have not seen soldiers as I have seen them, becoming bloated with wine and food, and soft in the arms of courtesans;' but Hannibal interrupted him, crying out to me again: 'Go! — go! There is little time

for the march, and it may be we are already too late. Go and do all things so that the lord, Baal Melkarth, shall favour us.' So I went out, and, having taken their talents, I am here. This old sheep has disgorged another talent together with gems. Therefore come now and we shall escape hence."

Marcia saw a dimness before her, amid which his jewels and bracelets and earrings seemed to mingle strange glancings with the fires that burned in his eyes. At last she faltered:—

"But your work?—it is not finished. How shall I know?—if I go with you?—"

The rings on his hand were sinking deep into her wrist; his lips were close to her ear.

"Ah! you will not go? You will play with me—deceive me? Listen now. To-morrow I shall be here with horses and money—in the morning—very early—before light; and you will go like a little bird that is tamed. These days will give us time to gain more, if more be needed. Look! I have hazarded all. Shall I lose my reward now because my work be unfinished by ever so little? It may be that, having gone, I shall not return. Do you think I will leave you here to laugh at me? You will go, or, to-morrow, Baal Melkarth shall speak the word, and, before midday, Hannibal shall give

orders to march to Rome. Why do you think I have gathered this wealth? Look! I have risked all for it, and you shall not escape."

Exhausted by his rapid vehemence, he stood back, breathing hard and trying to smile.

"Ah! moon of Tanis, you will come," he murmured, holding out his arms. "We shall escape to Sicily—to Greece—to Egypt—to the far East. We shall be rich with the spoils of fools—"

A slight scraping noise came to their ears, and both started. Iddilcar sprang swiftly to the entrance of the room, but the lamp in the hall had gone out, and his eyes saw nothing in the darkness. Uncertain what to do, he looked back to where Marcia stood, pale and rigid. His voice and hands trembled as he repeated in a loud whisper:—

"You will come? You will be ready?"

"Yes," she said, "I will come;" but she did not look at him, as she spoke, only she caught the triumphant gleam of his eyes; a thousand weird lights seemed to whirl around her, and she felt herself sinking. It seemed, for a moment, as if a slave in a gray tunic was supporting her, and then all consciousness fled.

XI.

THE SLAVE.

IT was an hour past midnight, when Marcia first knew the agony of returning reason. The gong in the Forum had just struck. Where was she? Surely in her own apartment! How had she come there? Then, slowly, the memory of yesterday grew clear—the awful duty of to-morrow. With eyelids fast shut, as if dreading to open them to the darkness, she buried her throbbing temples beneath the rich Campanian coverlid. She could still see the eyes of Iddilcar gleaming wolfish amid his jewels; could see him standing in the doorway, as he turned from that startled rush in pursuit of what had been, doubtless, only a whisper of their imaginations. He had said he would come for her—before daybreak—and she must be ready. Later, she could approach death with suppliant hands, but now she must be ready. Her life was not her own yet. It was her country's. Later, the shade of Lucius would beckon. Surely he would forgive her

for having avenged him. But how had she reached her room? Had it been Calavius or the slaves who had found her? did they suspect? Then she remembered the man who had seemed to catch her as she fell. Where could Iddilcar have been then? Had he hurried away? probably enough. Again a slight scratching noise, as of some one softly changing his position, —like the sound which had startled the priest, came to her ears. Ah, protecting gods! what was true, and what but dreams? Her whole life was passing before her, phantasmagorial and unreal. Surely some one was present! She *felt* it. Had Iddilcar come already? The horror of the thought gave her courage, and, thrusting down the coverlid, she opened her eyes defiantly and tried to pierce the darkness. Nothing was visible, but she knew she was not alone, and, leaning upon one elbow, she reached out, groping.

Suddenly a hand grasped hers, a strong, bony hand, gripping it tightly, and by its very energy commanding silence. It seemed strange to her that she did not scream, but then she had known that she would find some one, and had the hand been Iddilcar's, she would certainly have realized it by the loathing in her soul.

For her, now, all other men had become friends. Therefore she was not frightened, did not cry out — rather it was a soothing sense of companionship that came to her — almost of reliance. Why had this man come? — perhaps to help her; surely not to injure. Who was he? man or god? Gods had appeared to those of olden times, when the Republic was young, and Romans worshipped, believing. She felt very brave — fearless.

“Who are you?” she whispered.

“I am a slave,” answered a voice. “I brought you here, and I am watching.”

It was a voice that, while it rang hard, yet had in it an assurance of protection — even of power, and it thrilled her as with some familiar memory. Nevertheless she could not place its owner in the household. Calavius had many slaves; a few of them had been free-born, and some, perhaps, might even have known a measure of social standing, before the turn of war or of financial fortunes had lost them to home and position.

“Who are you?” she asked again.

“I am a new servant,” said the other. “Pacuvius Calavius bought me yesterday in the Street of the Whitened Feet.”

She was silent a moment, trying hard to think; she felt the man’s hand trembling, and

then, suddenly realizing, she drew her own away.

"And yet you are going to-morrow with this beast — this animal!" said the voice, bitterly.

Startled again by the tone and accent, no less than by the words, she burst out: —

"Ah! why do you say that? — but you do not know, and I cannot tell you. Yes, you are right. I am going away to-morrow. I am — a courtesan. What then?"

"By the gods! no!" he cried, and she heard him spring to his feet. Then, lowering his voice, "If I thought *that*, I would kill you."

"You would only forestall my own blow," she said quietly, and there was new silence.

At last he spoke again.

"Tell me all of this matter. You are safe. I am a Roman."

"A Roman — and a slave?"

"And a slave. Tell me the truth quickly."

The voice sounded weak and hollow now, but still strangely familiar. She began her story, speaking in a low monotone.

"I am Marcia, daughter of Titus Manlius Torquatus. I loved, and yet I drove my lover from me, and he was killed on the black day of Cannæ. Then the Senate feared lest the enemy should advance to Rome — prayed for

the winter—for time. And I was beautiful, and I had no love, save for the king, Orcus. So the thought came to me that by my blandishments I might win power with these people, and, by power, delay, and, by delay, safety for Rome—and revenge for my lord, Lucius. Therefore I journeyed to Capua. You see that I have played my part—that I have won? Tomorrow I go to pay the price. What matters it? Then I can die.”

He had listened in silence; only she heard his breath coming hard, and, a moment after she had finished, he spoke:—

“No—you cannot die—not thus. *I* have died—once, yet I live. Listen! I, like the lover you tell of, was slain at Cannæ, pierced through by javelins, and I lay with the dead heaped above me—ah! so many hours—days, perhaps—I do not know; until the slave-dealers, passing among the corpses, found me breathing, and wondered at my strength, auguring a good value. Therefore they took me, and when I was well of my wounds they brought me here—to Capua, and sold me to Pacuvius Calavius—to whom may the gods give the death of a traitor! Lo! now, let it be for a warning that Orcus does indeed send back the dead from Acheron.”

He leaned forward, as he spoke the words, and there came to Marcia a sudden memory of two occasions when she had used the ancient saying—the colloquial “never” of Rome. Once it had bound her to Iddilcar, and once, far back, in happier times, it had parted her forever from Sergius. Tears rolled down her cheeks. A dim light seemed to be creeping into the room—very dim, but as her eyes grew dry again, she could begin to trace the outlines of her companion sitting on a low stool beside her couch. Surely those were footsteps in the hall—yes, footsteps—and the approaching light of a lamp.

Marcia's heart stood still. The slave had started from his seat and drawn far back in the darkest corner of the room; then the curtains were pushed cautiously aside, and the tall form of Iddilcar stood revealed by the light of the small, silver lamp he bore in his hand. A long, dark mantle enveloped him from head to foot.

“Come,” he said, speaking sharply but in low tones; and, holding the lamp above his head, he tried to peer into the apartment. “Come; it will soon be light. Ah! you have not arisen? No matter; I have another cloak, and we must not delay. The slaves are well bribed, and Calavius sleeps soundly—forever.

My horses, good horses, are in the street; a few moments and we gain the gate. The schalischim's own ring is on my finger, and the seal of the Great Council shall win us egress. *You* are my slave: that is how you shall go with me — and I accept the omen."

He laughed low and harshly, and Marcia shuddered, thinking of her host lying slain — by his false slaves? — by the order of Hannibal? — no, rather by the hand or plotting of this wretch who now called her, "slave."

"Come, come quickly, Romanus," he said, mimicking the Latin nomenclature of foreign slaves. At the same time he took a step forward into the room and let the curtains fall behind him. "Come, or I shall have to order the rods to those white shoulders. That would be —"

And then a shadow seemed to glide forward from the corner half behind him. For a moment a stream of lamplight fell upon a white, set face behind the Carthaginian's shoulder — a face that was indeed from the land of the four rivers; an arm was lashed around the priest's neck, and, while Marcia stared spellbound at the shade that had come back to save her, the lamp fell from Iddilcar's hand, — and then she lay still and listened to the furious struggle

that ensued, the scuffling of feet upon the marble floor, the breathing that came and went in short, quick gasps. Now it seemed that both fell together; but not in victory or defeat, for the noises told of continuing combat; no words, only the horrible sound of writhing and of hard-drawn breath.

Breaking at last from the bonds of dazed wonder, she glided from the couch, groping for the fallen lamp. She must *see*. She must *know*. Then she remembered the room-lamp that stood on a stand by the bed, and began to feel her way toward it. The grating of metal against metal came to her ears, followed by a low exclamation and a sharp "Ah!" gasped exultantly; then came the sound of two fierce blows.

She had found the lamp now, and was trying to strike a light. The victory was still undecided, though the combatants seemed to groan with each breath they drew. At last the wick caught the spark, and the mellow light and the odour of perfumed oil began slowly to fill the room. A statuette or vase came crashing to the floor, and, raising the lamp high above her head, she threw its light upon the struggling men. For a moment she could make out nothing except a dark mass at her feet. Then she caught the glitter of a weapon, and at

last her eyes grasped something of the situation.

Iddilcar was undermost. She could see his black, curling beard that seemed matted and ragged now, while the Roman — the man who bore the face of the dead Sergius — was extended upon him, grasping, with both hands, the Carthaginian's wrists. It was the latter who held the blade that had glittered — a long Numidian dagger, but the hold upon his wrists prevented his using it, and the Roman dared not release either hand to wrench it away. There were bruises, too, on Iddilcar's face — the blows of fists; but the blood on the floor told of some other wound, doubtless the Roman's, inflicted before he could restrain the hand that dealt it. Now, neither seemed able to accomplish further injury, until the strength of one should fail; and if it was her protector's blood that was flowing? — the thought was ominous. Neither dared to cry out, for the aid that might come was too doubtful, and, besides, they needed to husband all the air their lungs could gain.

Marcia saw these things and thought them clearly, quickly, and in order. Her mind seemed to grow as strangely calm as if busied in selecting some shade of wool for her distaff. She reached down and, by a quick movement, twisted

the dagger from the stiffened, weary fingers of the Carthaginian. A cry burst from him — the first since the triumphant "Ah!" that had doubtless come from his lips when he used the weapon, a few moments since. He writhed furiously, and Marcia stood, holding the dagger in her hand, hesitating rather through dread of injuring this new Sergius that had arisen to aid her.

The Roman, however, seeing himself freed from the necessity of guarding against the sharp point that had menaced him, now suddenly released the wrists of his adversary, and, grasping him by the throat, he lifted his head several times, and struck it violently against the pavement. The Carthaginian groaned, and his hold relaxed for a moment. Then, tearing himself free, and with one hand still gripping the throat of the prostrate man, the Roman raised his body, and, turning toward Marcia, reached out for the dagger. With eyes fixed wonderingly on his, she gave it to him, as if only half conscious of her act.

Again the scene changed. Less helpless than he had seemed, and with staring eyes, before which death danced, Iddilcar gathered all his remaining strength for one last, despairing effort, wrenched himself loose, and staggered to his feet.

Then Marcia saw Sergius, for she knew now it was indeed he, saw him throw himself forward on his knees, and, catching Iddilcar about the hips, plunge the blade into his side.

The priest shrieked once, as he felt the point, and struggled furiously to escape, raining blows upon the other's head and shoulders. Again the long dagger rose and fell, piercing the man's entrails. Gods! would he never fall? — and still he maintained his footing, but now his hands beat only the air, and his struggles became agonized writhings. Sergius' grip about his hips had never loosened, and the dagger rose and fell a third time. Iddilcar groaned long and deeply and sank down in a heap, carrying his slayer with him.

XII.

FLIGHT.

SLOWLY Sergius disengaged himself from the death grip that entangled him, and, rising, turned to where Marcia stood. Still holding the lighted lamp above her head and peering forward, she gazed into his eyes with a look wherein wonder and terror were mingled with awakening joy.

"Who are you?" she faltered at last; "you who come as a slave, bearing the face of a shade?"

"I *am* a shade," he answered; "one sent back by Orcus — by the hand of Mercury, to save a Roman woman from dishonour."

"Oh, my lord Lucius!" she cried, falling upon her knees and holding out her hands toward him. "Truly it was not dishonour to avenge you, to save the Republic; but if it were, then may your manes pity and forgive me. There, now, is the dagger. Take it and use it, so that I, too, may be your companion when you return to the land that owns you. I

love you, Lucius; the laughter of the old days has passed. Surely a woman who is about to die may say to the dead words which a girl might not say to her lover for the shame of them. I love you—I love you. Take me before the maiden, Proserpine, that she may show us favour—to your land—”

The lamp fell from her hand; she felt herself raised suddenly from the pavement, and strained hard against a bosom that rose and fell with all the pulsations of life and love. Frightened, wondering, she struggled faintly, while kisses warm and human fell upon her brow, her eyes, her lips.

“Marcia, little bird, dearest, purest, best,” murmured a voice close to her ear; “yes, you shall go with me to my land, and that land is Rome.”

Still she trembled in his arms, not daring to believe.

“Wait,” he said. Then, releasing her for a moment, he regained the fallen lamp, relighted it and placed it in its niche, facing her again with arms outspread.

“Look well; am I not indeed Lucius Sergius—once pierced and worn with wounds, but now well and strong to fight or love? The tale I told you was true. It was my tale

— the saving of one Roman from the slaughter of her legions."

She drew closer and looked again into his eyes.

"Yes," she said, and in her voice the joy began to sweep away all other feelings; "yes, you are indeed Lucius Sergius Fidenas — man, not shade —"

But, taking her hand, he interrupted: —

"Do you not remember the omen, my Marcia? how you said you would love me when Orcus should send back the dead from Acheron? how I accepted it? how the gods have brought all about, as was most to their honour and my joy? — for now you have indeed said that you love me."

She placed her free hand upon his shoulder, saying: —

"And that which I, Marcia, daughter of Titus Manlius Torquatus, have said unto the shade, that say I to the living Lucius Sergius. Take me, love; for where thou art Caius there shall I be Caia."

Once again he took her in his arms and kissed her upon the lips, long and tenderly. Then she drew herself back.

"You are wounded?" she said anxiously. "Forgive me that I forgot. Truly I forget all things, now — in this wonder and joy."

Sergius laughed.

"He pricked me—in the thigh, I think, but not deeply. The gods have brought me so close to the shades that I am enough akin to them not to heed little hurts."

But she had seized the lamp and was examining his injury—a flesh wound that, while it had bled freely, yet seemed to have avoided the larger muscles and blood-vessels.

"Did I not tell you?" he said reassuringly, as she rose from her knee. "A close bandage so that it will not bleed—that is all we shall want, for my strength must remain with me yet a little while, if we would truly go to Rome and not to the realms of the dead."

She said nothing, but, tearing strips from her stole, proceeded deftly to bind them around the leg.

"Agathocles himself could not do better—nay, I doubt Æsculapius—" but she rose again quickly and placed her finger upon his lips.

"It is the gods who have saved us to each other. Do not make them angry, lest they withdraw their favour. I am ready to follow you, my lord Lucius."

Standing erect, he raised both hands in invocation.

"A shrine to Venus the Preserver!—to Apollo the Healer!"

Then, stooping quickly, he drew the long, dark robe of Iddilcar from where it lay entangled about the legs of the corpse. Fortunately it had slipped down from the Carthaginian's shoulders early in the struggle; perhaps he had tried to free himself from it; perhaps it had been partly torn away; but, in either event, it had fallen where it must have hampered his movements even more seriously, and where it was less stained with his blood than might have been expected.

Sergius threw it over his own tattered, blood-stained garments, striving to hide the rents, and raising it high about his neck so as to conceal his face as much as possible. Meanwhile, Marcia, having bound on her sandals, had of her own accord donned the mantle Iddilcar had brought for her, and which had fallen by the door of the apartment. Then, gathering up her long, thick hair, she confined it close above her head, drawing down upon it the hat that lay beside the cloak—a broad-brimmed Greek petasus, admirably adapted for concealment as well as protection.

"I am ready," she said eagerly. "Let us make haste."

Sergius was stooping over the dead man, searching for something.

"It is the ring," he said; "the ring with the seal of the Great Council of which he spoke. How else should we pass the guard at the gate?"

A moment later he rose, and, going to the light, examined carefully the several rings taken from the priest's fingers.

One by one they dropped and rolled away over the floor. The last only remained, and Marcia, looking over his shoulder, saw a heavy, gold signet bearing the device of a horse under a palm tree.

"Come now," he said, taking her hand. He had thrust the long knife of Iddilcar into the girdle of his tunic, and this was their only weapon. So, leading Marcia, he quickly traversed the halls and courts and gained the door, which hung ajar and unattended. Outside, a company of five men were gathered, all mounted. Two were apparently soldiers, a sort of guard; the rest were servants. Heavy looking packages were bound, behind them, on their horses' backs, doubtless the money which Iddilcar had gotten, while two extra animals, saddled and bridled, were held in waiting.

The heart of Sergius leaped as he noted

the fine, small heads and slender, muscular legs that marked the Asian stock of their mounts. Iddilcar had provided well for all emergencies; but Sergius felt some anxiety lest a chance glimpse of his face might lead to detection. The sky in the east was already beginning to lighten, and there were more men of the escort than he had anticipated. Speech would be fatal; therefore he strode quickly out, took the bridle of one of the horses from the man who held it, and swung himself upon its back. To assist Marcia could not be done without exciting suspicion, and he ground his teeth when she tried to follow his example, and one of the servants laughed and pushed her roughly into the saddle. Then they rode on, and the others followed, whispering together.

He had muffled his face a trifle too closely, perhaps, and he had mounted the horse standing, whereas all knew that the Cappadocians were trained to kneel at the word. Therefore the men of the escort wondered, though they hardly ventured to suspect.

Marcia felt, rather than noted, their attitude, and Sergius, glancing toward her, saw that she was trembling. He urged his horse faster toward the gate that opened upon the Appian Way; boldness and speed were all that could

save them. Suddenly the gate loomed up, gray and massive, in the mist of the early morning. Several soldiers lounged forward from the guard-house, whence came the rattle of dice and the shrill laughter of a woman. Sergius showed his ring and said nothing, while Marcia came close to him, shivering, for the morning air was chill and biting. Their followers had drawn rein, and were gathered in a little clump several spear-lengths behind.

Meanwhile the soldiers, Spaniards they seemed, were gazing stupidly at the device on the seal and making irrelevant comments. It was evident that their night had been spent among the wineskins, and that a new danger menaced.

Summoning what Punic he knew, Sergius leaned forward and asked in a low but stern voice to see their officer. Fortunately his own followers were too far away to hear his words, and drunken Iberians would not be critical as to a faulty Punic accent.

Still they hesitated, chattered together, and stared, but at last one who seemed more sober than the rest reeled away to the guard-house, and, after some delay and evident persuasion, emerged again with a young officer whose moist, hanging lips and filmy eyes showed that

he, too, had been dragged from the pursuit of pleasure. Helmetless and with loosened corselet, every detail of his appearance told the story of relaxed discipline.

"What do you want? at this hour?" he said thickly, ambling forward and leaning heavily upon the shoulder of his scarcely more steady guide.

Again Sèrgius held out the ring, and the man, being a native Carthaginian, recognized it through the mist of his intoxication, and, throwing himself at full length, touched the earth with his forehead.

"What do you wish?" he said, rising and standing, somewhat sobered by the presence of such authority.

"Open the gate. I ride under orders of the schalischim," said the Roman, again speaking low and rapidly.

The officer turned and shouted to his men, and several ran to unbar the gate with such speed as their condition warranted. The other occupants of the guard-house were now grouped at the door, five men, half armed, and two dishevelled women with painted faces and flower-embroidered pallas.

The gate swung slowly on its hinges.

"The light of the Baals be with you, friend!"

exclaimed Sergius, and he and Marcia rode through, with hearts beating madly. Voices raised in discussion made them turn in their saddles. In his drunken stupidity, the Carthaginian officer was trying to detain their escort and servants. "The master had said nothing about them. How did he know they belonged to the same party?" Then all began gesticulating and shouting to Sergius for help and explanation.

Here was an unforeseen incident, and the mind of the young Roman viewed it rapidly in all its lights. On the one side, he would be relieved of an awkward following that might at any moment begin to suspect him; on the other hand to leave these in the lurch would be to invite prompt suspicion. Still, they were fifty yards or more in advance, their horses were good, and more space would be gained before the tangle at the gate could be straightened out; therefore he waved his arm, as if making some signal, and, turning again in his saddle, rode on, but without increasing his speed.

Louder shouts followed him, for, as he had intended, his gesture had proved unintelligible. Then, when they saw he did not stop, the cries ceased suddenly and an animated chattering

came to his ears. Here was suspicion trying to make itself understood and, at last, succeeding, for, as Sergius glanced back once more to note how the matter progressed, the young captain of the gate sprang forward and shouted for him to halt.

“A third altar—to Mercury the hastener!” exclaimed Sergius. “Quick now! with the knees!” and, pressing the flanks of his Cappadocian, both animals bounded forward into a headlong gallop.

XIII.

WINTER QUARTERS.

THE beat of hoofs upon the great blocks of basalt rang through the morning air in measured cadence, and soon an answering echo came up from the south. Open flight had at last dispelled all doubt and given the signal for pursuit.

First came the two Africans of the original escort, released and bidden to ride for life or death; a short distance behind was the Carthaginian captain on his own horse which had probably been haltered behind the guard-house; and, last of all, three of the Spanish guard, who had thrown the servants and baggage from the animals that bore them, and appropriated such speed as these afforded for the business in hand.

That the officer was pretty well sobered seemed apparent. A fugitive bearing the ring of the schalischim — the seal of the Great Council — must be a man of importance, or else the possession of such a talisman augured the

commission of some terrible crime. Already he saw himself stretched writhing upon the cross; the crowd, reviling or gibing, seemed surging about his feet; and his howls of anguish found voice in a storm of guttural objurgations to men and horses, mingled with prayers and vows to the gods of Carthage.

He had overtaken the two Africans now, for his animal was better than theirs, but the three others laboured hopelessly behind: the Cappadocians flew rather than galloped far in advance. Already nearly three hundred yards separated them from their pursuers, and the gap was widening slowly but surely. Only the officer held his own, for he was now forging ahead of the Africans.

"Ah, cowards! slime! filth!" he shouted to his struggling men. "The cross! the cross! that for you unless we catch them! that for me!—for all! Ah, Eschmoun! Ah, Khamon!—Melkarth!—gifts!—gold, gems, robes, spices!—my first-born to the Baals! to the Baals! Help! speed!"

The man was mad — mad indeed with terror and newly dispelled drunkenness; and his horse, a great African, coal-black save for one white hoof, seemed to partake of his master's frenzy. With ears lying flat along his head, and eyes

that burned into those of Sergius, when he ventured to glance behind him, — glaring sheer through distance and dust like the very eyes of those demons his rider invoked, — the beast thundered on, equalling the speed of the light Asiatic chargers by the force of strength alone.

From time to time the fugitives turned their heads to measure the distance, and the sight of this unwearied pursuer appeared to fascinate them as by some weird power. The rest were beaten out, — the Spaniards lost to sight, the Africans visible only by the dust that hung over them far behind.

The mountains to the eastward seemed to be dancing away in a mad chase toward the south, a chase which Tifata itself was urging on. The glimmer of white in the north told of the morning sun striking upon houses. Still they rode on, pursuers and pursued.

Suddenly a sound, half-trumpet note, half bellow, swelled up ahead. Then another answered it, and another and another took up the refrain.

Sergius' face blanched, and, with a sudden effort, he threw his animal almost upon its haunches. Marcia was carried several spear-lengths farther before she could check her speed. Wonder and the dread of some accident

drove the blood to her heart. A hoarse shout of triumph came from their pursuer, as she turned to ride back.

She asked no questions. Surely Sergius knew what was best. She saw Iddilcar's long dagger in his hand, and that he was about to fight.

"Back! — back! and to one side," he called, as she rode up. "Did you not hear the elephants? That is Casilinum, and they are besieging it. We should have remembered."

He darted forward to meet the Carthaginian, fearful that he, too, would draw rein and await the coming of his followers. Then indeed all would be lost. Six soldiers on the one side and a camp full on the other were hopeless odds against a wounded man armed only with a Numidian dagger.

But it was Bacchus that fought for Rome that day — Bacchus, to whom no altar had been vowed. A night of debauchery and the sudden terror of its awakening had effectually blurred whatever judgment the officer may have had, and his one thought was to kill or capture his quarry.

So they came together, Sergius swerving his Cappadocian as they met. The officer struck blindly, but the good lord Bacchus put

out his hand and turned the blow aside. Then, as they parted, a strange thing happened. Marcia had wondered dimly why Sergius struggled with the long, girdleless garment of Iddilcar, tearing it off as he rode. Now, when the two horses sprang apart, she saw that he had thrown it dexterously over the Carthaginian, blinding his blow and tangling him in its heavy folds.

Prompt to respond to knee and rein, the Capadocian wheeled, almost as soon as he ran clear, but the African thundered on, while its rider cursed in blind terror and tried to check his horse and to free his face and sword-arm. A moment, and he had succeeded, but he succeeded too late. The Roman was at his back, and Marcia saw the long dagger rise and fall in a swift thrust. She could not see how the point took its victim just at the nape; but she saw him pitch forward like an ox under the axe.

Almost before she could grasp what had happened, Sergius was beside the fallen man, had resumed the priest's tunic, red with new blood stains, and was on his horse again. His brow lay in deep lines as he rode toward her.

"Come," he said. "The gods favouring us, we must pass their camp before the rest

come up. Grant that those may linger by the corpse, and that we meet no check."

Again they were galloping toward the lines that lay about Casilinum. All had happened so quickly that even now they could scarcely see the plume in the distant dust cloud that told where the pursuers straggled on. They had turned into the new side road without meeting a man. Then a small foraging party halted them, and Sergius showed the seal and spoke in Gallic to its Numidian leader. A little farther on was stationed another band, and here the delay was longer ere his halting Punic convinced the Spanish piquet, and they again rode forward unsuspected. All had bowed low to the horse and the palm tree, and no one dared question what weighty mission urged on the man in the torn and blood-stained tunic and the slender youth, his companion.

Now they were back again upon the pavement of the Appian ; the last line was passed, and the beleaguered town with its stout-hearted garrison lay well behind. Perhaps that sudden uproar told of the arrival of their pursuers ; perhaps those glittering points amid distant dust clouds meant a new pursuit. Surely none but Mercury had winged the feet of the Cappadocians ! Unwearied, like springs of steel, the stout

muscles drove them on — on over the marsh-land with the glint of the sea before them — on, up the rising ground.

Again and again Sergius turned in his saddle scanning the road behind, feeling the presence of pursuers whom he could not see. The good horses were weakening fast. No flesh and blood could stand that strain, and naught but the spirit of the breed kept them afoot. Marcia's was limping painfully; the one Sergius rode was wavering in its stride, like the Carthaginian captain when he came out of the guard-house by the gate.

"Gods! What were those shrill sounds — half whistle, half scream?"

Too well he remembered how the Numidians urged on their bridleless chargers. Yes, there they were now — scarce half a milestone behind and coming up like the wind that blew through their dishevelled manes — fifty at least. Death, then, was decreed, after all, and he glanced toward Marcia, measuring the time when he might kiss her and kill her ere he sold his own life to the javelins.

Suddenly he heard her cry out.

"Look!" she called, and, following her finger, he gazed eagerly ahead.

A clump of horsemen, heavy armed with

helmet and corselet, crowned the knoll of rising ground over which the road led, and, above them, fluttering in the breeze, he saw the square vexillum of the cavalry of the legion.

He was among them now, lifting Marcia from her horse and dimly conscious of many words being spoken around.

"See, lord, they have halted," said a voice. "Is it your will that we pursue?"

Then, as an answering voice replied in the negative, he kissed Marcia and made her drink wine that some one brought. Barbarous cries that she must not hear or understand came to his ears, and he knew that their pursuers were wheeling in discomfited flight. The circle of soldiers stood back. Something cold and feathery fell upon his upturned face and turned to moisture. He saw a tall man with features of wonderful beauty regarding them kindly and in silence; his white paludimentum was heavily fringed with purple, and Sergius recognized him now, — Marcus Marcellus, the new dictator. Another drop, feathery, cold, and moist, fell upon Marcia's hand, and she roused herself at the touch, peering up into her lover's face and then quickly at the heavens.

"Look!" she cried. "Up! not into my eyes."

He turned, for an instant, to see the blue vault of a few moments since overcast with gray and filled with a swirl of snowy flakes.

"See, now, Lucius, lord of my life; here are the messengers of winter. Winter quarters! he is in winter quarters! See! have we not prevailed?"

It was the voice of the dictator that answered:—

"Yes, truly; and there shall soon be prepared for him eternal summer quarters in Phlegethon—if the Greek tales be true."

